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WOMEN OF THE CLASSICS

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Our Lady of Sion.

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"TOLD THROUGH THE AGES"

WOMEN OF THE CLASSICS

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WOMEN OF THE CLASSICS

BY

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"STUDIES OF CONTEMPORARY POETS"
"MICHAEL FIELD" ETC.

GEORGE G. HARRAP & COMPANY LTD.
LONDON BOMBAY SYDNEY

First published June 1914
by GEORGE G. HARRAP & COMPANY
39–41 *Parker Street, Kingsway, London, W.C.*2

Reprinted in the present series: January 1927;
September 1930

Printed in Great Britain by Neill & Co. Ltd., Edinburgh

Contents

	PAGE
INTRODUCTION	9
WOMEN OF HOMER	
HELEN	15
ANDROMACHE	25
PENELOPE	34
CIRCE	51
CALYPSO	62
NAUSICAA	70
WOMEN OF ATTIC TRAGEDY	
I. ÆSCHYLUS	
CLYTEMNESTRA	81
ELECTRA	97
CASSANDRA	112
IO	123
II. SOPHOCLES	
JOCASTA	134
ANTIGONE	155
III. EURIPIDES	
ALCESTIS	177
MEDEA	192
PHÆDRA	207
IPHIGENIA	219
A WOMAN OF VIRGIL	
DIDO	237

Illustrations

	PAGE
PHÆDRA *Gertrude Demain Hammond, R.I.*	*Frontispiece*
HELEN OF TROY *Lord Leighton*	18
PENELOPE *Patten Wilson*	44
CLYTEMNESTRA *Hon. John Collier*	94
ELECTRA *Gertrude Demain Hammond, R.I.*	106
JOCASTA *Gertrude Demain Hammond, R.I.*	140
ŒDIPUS AND ANTIGONE *From the sculpture by Hugues in the Luxembourg*	162
MEDEA AND ABSYRTUS *Herbert Draper*	194

Introduction

THE women in this book are the heroines of Homer, of Attic Tragedy, and of the *Æneid* of Virgil. Their stories are taken out of the best modern translations of the old poems; and they are retold from the human standpoint, with the minimum of critical comment.

It is curious, when we reflect a moment, how little we really know about the women of the classics. Their names have been familiar to us as long as we can remember. We have always been vaguely conscious of a glory clothing them—sometimes sombre and troubled, often gracious and serene, occasionally enchanting. About the greatest of them some floating hints of identity ripple on the surface of the mind. But we can by no means fit these little fragments into any clear outline of the sublime beauty of their originals. And when we light upon a reference to them in our reading, or stand before one of the innumerable works of art which they have inspired, memory is baffled. We have no clue to the spell that they have cast upon the centuries: the spell itself has no power over us; and we grope in vain for the key which would admit us to a world of delight.

There were reasons for this state of affairs when translations were few and costly: when scholars were merely pedants and when the classics were sealed to women.

But *nous avons changé tout cela.* Fine translations can be bought for a few shillings. Women are themselves engaging in the study of the old languages and of the sciences which are akin to them. Scholarship is growing more human; and the awakened spirit of womanhood, having become conscious of itself, cannot fail to be profoundly interested in that earlier awakening which, twenty-five centuries ago, evoked creatures so splendid. Of the women of Attic Tragedy Professor Gilbert Murray has said, in his *Rise of the Greek Epic*: "Consider for a moment the whole magnificent file of heroines in Greek Tragedy, both for good and evil. . . . I doubt if there has ever in the history of the world been a period, not even excepting the Elizabethan Age and the Nineteenth Century, when such a gallery of heroic women has been represented in Drama."

By bringing these women together into a single volume, it is hoped to make their stories easily accessible; and by quoting some of the most beautiful passages from the poems in which they live, it is hoped to send the reader back to the poets themselves. It has not been possible to include all the heroines in the available space; and several of those who are missing have only been omitted under the direst necessity. But all the greatest are here; and an effort has been made to choose each group so that it shall represent so far as may be the characteristics of its own poet. The source of the story is indicated in each case, and has been closely followed.

A word may be necessary on one or two points, to those

who are coming to these stories from the classics with an unfamiliar eye. It will be found that there is a singular reticence here on that aspect of love which engrosses modern literature. It is occasionally treated by Euripides; but even he handles the theme delicately and with reserve. Nowhere in these stories—with the exception of Dido, who of course belongs to a later civilization than the Greek women—is the love which leads to marriage dealt with explicitly. It is implicit sometimes, and we who have been born into a heritage of romanticism may delightedly trace it out and make the most of it. But the old poet never does: indeed, he hardly seems to realize that he has put it there. He belongs to a time when women were not wooed and won, but literally bought "with great store of presents," or acquired in other prosaic ways, which vary according to the several epochs and their customs. The love of men and women is treated from the point of view of husband and wife, of sister and brother, of daughter and father, rather than from the standpoint of the feverish hopes and fears of romantic passion. Marriage is not so much the culmination as the starting-point of an eventful story; and the heroic devotion of sister and daughter is crowned, no less than wifely fidelity, with everlasting honour. We must therefore be prepared for a change from the warmth and glow of romance to the tonic air of a more austere idealism.

Again, these women are not the complex creatures of modern civilization. The earliest of them, Homer's women, are drawn in outline only. They are great and

splendid; and because they were created for an aristocratic audience they are noble, dignified, and placed high above the small things of common life. There is hardly any comedy in Homer, and reality is far away. When we come to the dramatists we find, as we should expect, a great advance in characterization. The women are stronger, more real, more complete. But they are still very far from the psychological subtlety of modern drama.

There is, too, a singular reticence about the personal appearance of the heroines. We are rarely told what manner of women they were to look at. Virgil comes one step nearer to our modern love of description when he portrays Dido as she rides out on the fatal morning of the hunt; and when he paints the glowing figure of Camilla as she rushes into battle. But it would be very hard to discover what was the colour of Helen's eyes, although the old German *Faustbuch* of the Middle Age has dared to assert that they were "black as coals." Homer has a more excellent way. Instead of enumerating the charms of his heroine, as it were in a catalogue of perfections, he brings her into the presence of hostile folk, who on all counts have reason to hate her, and in a few vivid phrases shows the potent effect of her beauty upon them.

We shall find that the heroines have a system of ethics which is different from that of our own day; and strange moral contradictions may present themselves to our astonished eyes. Electra, with the tenderest love for her dead father, will not rest until the death of her guilty mother has been compassed. Antigone, infinitely gentle

to the blind Œdipus, is capable of resolute opposition to the law as it is embodied in Creon. But though the lines of moral demarcation are differently placed, they are not blurred. Revenge is a duty in this primitive saga upon which the poets drew for their material; and in which there is much that is savage and terrible.

Greek drama was a religious ritual closely bound to ancient myth and heroic legend, from which the poets could not escape. Hence, if these stories are approached in an analytical mood, they will be found barbarous and wildly improbable. If we give the rein to humour, we shall be overcome by frequent absurdities. The best way is to come to them quite simply, leaving the comic and the critical spirits a little way behind.

Grateful thanks are due to the translators and publishers who have kindly given permission to quote the passages used herein; and the author wishes humbly to acknowledge the debt she owes to critical work in this field. She is especially conscious of help from Professor Gilbert Murray in interpreting some of the Women of Tragedy. A note of the sources of the quotations will be found at the end of each chapter.

Homer: Helen

IN the twilight of early Greek history, one event and one name blaze like beacons. They are the siege of Troy and the name of Helen. They have not come down to us as cold fact, but burning through a mist of legend and poetry. The historian cannot name the date of the Trojan war; and the archæologist, whose labours have been so fruitful at Mycenæ and in Crete, can only point doubtfully to the ancient site of Troy.

Yet that event, and its cause, fair Helen of Sparta, may be said to mark the beginning of national life for the Greeks. Perhaps it was more than two thousand years before Christ when all the little peoples of Greece first joined themselves against barbarian Asia. Troy fell; and although the victory brought little material reward to the Greeks; though they sailed back to their island homes poorer and sadder than when they left, they had in fact achieved momentous gains. For the struggle had first taught them the strength of unity: it had launched them on their long and triumphant feud against barbarism; and it had laid the base from which they might go on to build, through the long, slow centuries, the civilization that we inherit.

There was no historian to record the event. But it lived on, in memory and in legend; and as the people became more settled, wandering bards made songs about it. The

rich Mycenæn Age flourished and died; and the Homeric civilization took its place. Probably it was then that the floating fragments of the Tale of Troy first were woven together, providing material for the Homeric epics that we know as the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. Probably they were not written down at first. They were composed, and recited, in separate parts, in the halls of the great lords, who loved to look back on this glorious event of their national life, and to hear the names of their remote and half-mythical ancestors brought into the story.

We come, then, at once to the *Iliad*, where, in the Third Book, Helen makes her first appearance in the world's literature. War has been raging round the walls of Troy for nearly ten years. Now a truce is called; and in the palace of the old King Priam word goes round that Paris, the author of the long feud, is to fight in single combat with Menelaus, whom he has wronged. For Paris had brought the bane of war upon Ilios. At his birth, the oracles of the gods had demanded that he should die; and Priam, his father, sorrowfully handed over the wailing baby to the priest, to be exposed upon Mount Ida. But first he tied an old ring about his neck; and when Paris was strangely saved from death, and grew up to be the fairest and strongest of all the shepherd youths on Ida, he came one day by accident to Ilios. There, by means of the jewel hanging from his neck, he was made known as the son of the King. Thenceforward the poor shepherd was the best beloved of all the princes. Life went gaily; and for a while he was utterly content. But he had left

behind, amidst the groves of Mount Ida, a sweet wood-nymph who loved him well, Enone. And when after a time he began to tire of life in the palace, he remembered her and thought longingly of the freshness and beauty of the mountain. So one day in summer he went to seek Enone. All day long he searched the forest, but could not find her; and coming tired at evening to a fragrant glade, he fell asleep. When he awoke night was hushed all around, and stars peeped through the slender branches overhead. It was midnight and there was no moon; but it was not dark. The glade was filled with a soft radiance such as he had never seen before, and when he raised his wondering eyes he saw the majestical figures of goddesses shining upon him: Hera, Queen of Olympus, Athena, the wise maid of Zeus, and Aphrodite, the laughing goddess of love. Sweetly they smiled on him; and as he stood in wondering awe, the deep, rich tones of Hera sank upon his spirit, promising him greatness and power, and the lordship over many lands. Then Athena, resting her starlike gaze upon him, promised him wisdom and courage; and Aphrodite, with a little mocking laugh at power and at wisdom, promised him the fairest woman in the world. Only, and this was to be the price of the gift, he was to be the arbiter between them: he was to declare which was most beautiful.

There was only one answer possible to Paris. Ambition had no lure for him. Why fight and strive and spend the happy days in effort merely to be called great? And wisdom had no appeal for him either; she seemed

austere and cold. What had she to do with the joy and grace and sweetness that his soul loved? To the sublimity of Hera he bent in awe. The shining purity of Athena smote his glance to the earth. But the voice of Aphrodite wooed him, and her winsome smile set him trembling with delight. He reached out to her the golden prize of beauty.

So Paris was to gain the fairest woman in the world. It seemed an honest promise, full of the happiest portent; and the young Prince soon set out upon his search for a bride over the western seas. But Aphrodite was no better than a cheat, and had invoked on Paris, though he did not know it then, the curse of guilty love. For the exquisite child who was to be the world's queen of beauty had grown up in the home of Tyndareus, King of Sparta; and even while the goddess gave her word to Paris was happily married to Menelaus there. To her and to her husband Paris came in his wanderings, led unwittingly by the laughter-loving goddess, and clothed by her in beauty like a god. They feasted him and did him honour; and sitting at the banquet which they made to him he told the strange tale of his life and his quest.

Helen listened to his story with a sudden prescience of what was to come; and rising softly, left the banqueting hall and went away to implore the goddess to avert the doom. But she was no match for Aphrodite. Anger and entreaty could not move the wanton Olympian, but she would grant one boon—Helen should be oblivious of all her past. Under the spell, the love of husband and child

HELEN OF TROY 18

Lord Leighton

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faded out; and even the memory of them vanished when on that spring morning in the garden of the palace, Paris met her beside the stream, "'twixt the lily and the rose."

Together they fled in the dewy morning, Paris urging his horses with guilty haste to the ships. And there, with Menelaus thundering along the road after them, they set sail for Troy, fulfilling the old prophecy, and lighting a brand by their deed which should burn the sacred city to the ground. For Tyndareus, when he chose a husband for Helen amongst her many suitors, had won a promise that they would all defend the one who gained her. Agamemnon, brother to Menelaus, and the great overlord of the Hellenic princes, now summoned the allies to avenge his brother, and for ten years they toiled at fitting out a fleet. Then they "launched a thousand ships," and sailed to punish Ilios for the sin of Paris.

Meantime, Helen had wakened sadly from the spell of Aphrodite. Little by little memory of her home came back, and with it came remorse. She was lonely too, and disillusion crept upon her. The Trojans, who at first had welcomed her as a goddess, soon began to look askance at her when rumours came of the great siege that was preparing. Mothers and wives of the Trojan princes held aloof; and soon the only friends left to her were the kind old King and Hector, the noble defender of the city. But there was worse behind. Little by little the truth dawned that Paris, for whom she had lost so much, and who had seemed so godlike in his strength and beauty, was very

poor humanity indeed. The story of Enone was told to her; and that showed him unfaithful. And when the Leaguer actually lay beneath the walls she soon found that Paris was a coward too.

Now, in this Third *Iliad*, we find that the cruel siege had wasted Troy for nearly ten years. The armies, reduced by death and pestilence and famine, were beginning to murmur against the worthless cause of all their misery; and Paris, for very shame, could no longer shelter himself within the city. At this eleventh hour he issued out to meet Menelaus in single combat. Helen was sitting in her inner hall, weaving a purple web and embroidering upon it the battle scenes which ebbed and flowed around the walls. Time and sorrow had only given her beauty an added charm. She was still young, fresh, and exquisitely fair, as on that spring morning in Lacedæmon when Aphrodite graced her for the meeting with Paris. To her, as her sweet face bent over the web, the goddess Iris brought the news of the impending combat: "They that erst waged tearful war upon each other in the plain, eager for deadly battle, even they sit now in silence, and the battle is stayed, and they lean upon their shields, and the tall spears are planted by their sides. But Paris and Menelaus dear to Ares will fight with their tall spears for thee; and thou wilt be declared the dear wife of him that conquereth."

At the name of Menelaus a wave of homesickness filled Helen's heart. Great tears flooded her eyes, and drawing on a shining veil she left her embroideries and hastened

out to the Skaian gates to watch the duel. But there, sitting upon the tower, were Priam and his counsellors; and Helen and her maids hesitated at sight of them. They were feeble old men. The fire and strength of youth had gone, leaving in their place the cold wisdom of age. They and their people had suffered deeply because of Helen; and they had every cause to hate her. Yet as she approached, veiled and slackening her pace from fear when she saw them, all their wrongs were forgotten in wonderment at her beauty.

Presently, Paris and Menelaus are engaged in fight below the walls, with Helen looking on from above in fearful expectancy. It was an unequal fight. Aphrodite had joined the side of Paris; and when, despite her tricks, Menelaus was gaining on his opponent, the goddess enveloped Paris in a cloud and carried him off. In plain words, he ran away.

The truce broken, the armies rushed into conflict again, and two of the gods who were warring for Troy were driven back to Olympus. Then Hector came into the palace to rouse his brother, and found him sitting in Helen's room, polishing his armour. To the scornful reproaches of Hector Paris gave only puerile answers, and Helen turned from him to Hector in passionate scorn.

Hector answered her with a gentle word, and went out, bearing on his shoulders the doom of Troy. In his chivalrous kindness to Helen, he is a worthy son of Priam; and when he was slain at last, fighting for his beloved city alone with the terrible Achilles, Helen joined her lament to

those of his mother and his wife, in perhaps the most noble tribute to his memory.

Our last glimpse of Helen in the *Iliad* is as she wails her mournful threnos over the body of Hector.

We hear no word of the Greek calamity in the fall of Achilles, or how Paris was slain by the arrow of the outcast Philoctetes, with perfect poetical justice. Nothing is told of the massacre of Priam and his sons; of the burning of the city; of the carrying off of its wealth and of its fair women when the Greeks, sated with revenge at last, set sail for Argos. And we hear no word of the most amazing fact of all—the reconciliation of Helen and Menelaus. We know from the *Odyssey* that they were reconciled, but how, Homer does not say. Legend and song have been busy with the theme, however, and the most beautiful story has been woven by Andrew Lang into his *Helen of Troy*. There we see how Aphrodite, in the midst of the slaughter and outrage, led Helen in safety to the ships, while Menelaus raged through the city seeking her, grimly determined to give her over to the vengeance of the army.

Lulled again by the arts of Aphrodite, Helen has completely forgotten all that has happened in the dreadful interval of the years since she last fell asleep at Lacedæmon. But Menelaus feels the fierce anger rise in his heart against her. He seizes and binds her, and carries her off to deliver her to the vengeance of the people. He reminds them of all they have endured and suffered, and calls upon them to mete to her the just death for such an one as she.

But when the soldiers in their rage would have stoned her; when Menelaus rushed upon her with uplifted spear, Aphrodite drew the veil from before her matchless face.

So Helen went home to Lacedæmon again, the dear wife of Menelaus. And when we take up the second great Homeric epic, the *Odyssey*, we find her the serene and gracious hostess of young Telemachus. All the hateful past is purged away.

She still remembers the horror of those days; and when Menelaus is wondering who the stranger Prince is who has sought their hospitality, Helen's quick wit perceives how like he is to Odysseus. Is not this, she asks, the son whom Odysseus left in his house as a new-born child when the war began?

It is indeed the son of Odysseus; and by the irony of fate he has come to inquire from the very author of his sorrows news of the father who, for aught Helen knows, has long ago been driven by Poseidon to the House of Hades.

> *Wept Argive Helen, child of Zeus, and wept*
> *Telemachus, and with him at the word*
> *Wept Menelaus.*[1]

But the ready tears of heroes are soon dried. They cheer Telemachus so far as they may by tales of his father's craft and courage before Troy; and Helen mixes for him the cup of Nepenthe, which steeps memory in a mist and banishes care and calls a smile to the lips. She does not herself taste of the magic drink, however; she has no wish

to forget. Secure now in the peace of home and enfolded by generous forgiveness, she will always remember, until she comes to pass through Lethe on her way to the Elysian Fields. And there, when the time came, she was translated "where falls not rain, or hail, or any snow." A shrine was built to her, and Greek men and maidens worshipped her as one of the immortal gods themselves.

[1] From Professor J. W. Mackail's translation of the *Odyssey* (John Murray).

Homer: Andromache

ANDROMACHE was the young wife of Hector, Priam's warrior son and defender of Troy. Over against the figure of Helen in the *Iliad* her gentle integrity stands in mute reproach. It is as though Homer, whose chivalry to Helen will not permit him to censure her, yet feels the claim of a larger chivalry—to womanhood itself. So he seems impelled to create this type of gracious purity, vindicating wifely honour and motherly tenderness; and proving at the same time that if his race had a high ideal of beauty, it had also a profound regard for domestic ties.

Andromache had been happy, and a princess, in her girlhood days, before Paris brought a Greek bride from Sparta. Her father was Eëtion, King of Thebes, in "wooded Plakos"; and in those times she had a gentle mother and seven strong brothers. But the Greeks came, and in the long years when the Leaguer lay beneath Troy their terrible hero Achilles had ravaged the countries around, and had taken the city of Thebes. He had slain Eëtion her father and the seven fine youths who were her brothers. Her mother, too, though ransomed from the Greeks for a great price, had died of grief; and Andromache, utterly forlorn, had found refuge in the halls of Priam. She found a mate there too; and in the love of Hector her father and mother and brothers were all given back to her.

Homer makes the tender devotion of this noble pair stand out in gracious contrast to the stormy passion of Paris and Helen. Yet he does not tell us much about Andromache. He does not describe her—indeed, he very rarely draws a picture of his women—but we know that she is beautiful. In some subtle way there is left on our mind an impression of blended grace and dignity, of sweetness and tenderness and fidelity; but we are not directly told that she possesses these qualities. We do not even see her till, in the Sixth Book of the *Iliad*, the time has come for her to part from her husband.

The Greeks were at the very gates of Troy, and the last phase had come for the sacred city. Diomedes had driven their god Ares from the field, bellowing with the pain of a wound; and Hector, who saw the end was coming, hurried into the palace to rouse his followers and beg the Queen to pray for the cause of Troy in the Temple of Athena. Then, before returning to the fight, he snatched the opportunity to see his wife and child once more. At first he could not find them. Andromache was not in the palace, nor in the Temple of Athena where the matrons of the city were propitiating the goddess. She had heard that the Trojans were hard pressed, and in fear for her husband she had gone down to the tower to watch the battle from the walls.

"Hector hastened from his house back by the same way down the well-builded streets. When he had passed through the great city and was come to the Skaian gates, whereby he was minded to issue upon the plain, there

came his dear-won wife running to meet him. . . . So she met him now, and with her went the handmaid bearing in her bosom the tender boy, the little child, Hector's loved son, like unto a beautiful star. . . . So now he smiled and gazed at his boy silently, and Andromache stood by his side weeping, and clasped her hand in his, and spake and called upon his name. 'Dear my lord, this thy hardihood will undo thee, neither hast thou any pity for thine infant boy, nor for me forlorn that soon shall be thy widow; for soon will the Achæans all set upon thee and slay thee. But it were better for me to go down to the grave if I lose thee; for never more will any comfort be mine, when once thou, even thou, hast met thy fate, but only sorrow.'" [1]

So she weeps to him, forgetting the heroic, as heroes often do in overwhelming human sorrow. Hector is human too; and as she pours out all the pleas that touch him most nearly—her love for him, his love for her, and their mutual love for their child—he cannot utter the reply of the soldier and defender of his people. Andromache thinks she sees an instant of wavering in his eyes; she catches at it wildly, and rushes on to tell of a place where he and his men may screen themselves from the enemy. But that word has lost her cause. Hector's great refusal is brave and gentle: "Surely . . . I have very sore shame . . . if like a coward I shrink away from battle. Moreover, mine own soul forbiddeth me. . . . Yea of a surety I know . . . the day shall come for holy Ilios to be laid low. . . . Yet doth the anguish of the Trojans hereafter not so much trouble me, neither Hekabe's own, neither

King Priam's, neither my brethren's . . . as doth thine anguish in the day when some mail-clad Achaian shall . . . rob thee of the light of freedom. . . . But me in death may the heaped-up earth be covering, ere I hear thy crying and thy carrying into captivity." [1]

Andromache can find no answer, and there is silence between them as Hector turns to caress his boy. But the child shrinks to his nurse in fear of the shining helmet and nodding crest; and the parents laugh through their tears.

"Then his dear father laughed aloud, and his lady mother; forthwith glorious Hector took the helmet from his head, and laid it, all gleaming, upon the earth; then kissed he his dear son and dandled him in his arms, and spake in prayer to Zeus and all the gods, . . . 'Vouchsafe ye that this my son may likewise prove even as I, pre-eminent amid the Trojans, and as valiant in might, and be a great king of Ilios. May men say of him, "Far greater is he than his father," as he returneth from battle; . . . and may his mother's heart be glad.'" [1]

In his warrior-prayer Andromache cannot join; and to us who know the fate of Hector's son there is appalling irony in this appeal to the gods. She takes her boy into her arms, smiling tearfully.

"And her husband had pity to see her, and caressed her with his hand and spake and called upon her name: 'Dear one, I pray thee be not of over-sorrowful heart; no man against my fate shall hurl me to Hades. . . . But go thou to thine house and see to thine own tasks . . . but for war

shall men provide, and I in chief of all men that dwell in Ilios.'

"So spake glorious Hector, and took up his horsehair-crested helmet; and his dear wife departed to her home, oft looking back, and letting fall big tears." [1]

But the end had not quite come for Hector and his beloved Troy. For a time the tide of battle rolled back against the Greeks, and while Achilles fumed idly in his tent Hector pressed upon them until he had forced them back to their ships. The immortals came into the field again; and success swayed to one or the other side, as Zeus to the Trojans or Hera to the Greeks lent aid. Then Hector slew Patroclus, the dear friend of Achilles; and that event drew the Greek hero forth at last, raging in grief and anger. Furnished with new armour by his goddess-mother Thetis, Achilles went out against the Trojans like a destroying flame. He drove them into the city with terrible slaughter; and then faced Hector alone outside the Skaian gates, and slew him there.

Meanwhile Andromache had won a little hope again from the past few days of success to the Trojan arms. She knew nothing of the duel, and her husband's fate at the hands of Achilles; but was sitting quietly within her hall, while the maids prepared warm baths for his return.

"Then she called to her goodly-haired maids through the house to set a great tripod on the fire, that Hector might have warm washing when he came home out of the battle—fond heart, and was unaware how, far from all washings, bright-eyed Athene had slain him by the hand

of Achilles. But she heard shrieks and groans from the battlements, and her limbs reeled, and the shuttle fell from her hands to the earth. Then again among her goodly-haired maids she spake: 'Come two of ye this way with me that I may see what deeds are done. . . . Terribly I dread lest noble Achilles have cut off bold Hector from the city by himself and chased him to the plain and ere this ended his perilous pride that possessed him, for never would he tarry among the throng of men but ran out before them far, yielding place to no man in his hardihood.'

"Thus saying she sped through the chamber like one mad, with beating heart, and with her went her handmaidens. But when she came to the battlements and the throng of men, she stood still upon the wall and gazed, and beheld him dragged before the city:—swift horses dragged him recklessly toward the hollow ships of the Achaians. Then dark night came on her eyes and shrouded her, and she fell backward and gasped forth her spirit."[1]

We must not dwell upon the grim vengeance which Achilles took upon the dead body of Hector, for the life of his friend; nor the wonderful funeral rites for Patroclus; nor the pitiful story of old Priam's visit to Achilles at dead of night, to beg for the body of his great son.

But when the poor insulted body was at last recovered all the city went out to meet it and bring it in with lamentation. Andromache led the women, wailing in her grief: "Husband, thou art gone young from life, and leavest me a widow in thy halls. And the child is yet but

a little one, child of ill-fated parents, thee and me; nor methinks shall he grow up to manhood, for ere then shall this city be utterly destroyed. For thou art verily perished who didst watch over it, who guardest it and keptest safe its noble wives and infant little ones. These soon shall be voyaging in the hollow ships, yea and I too with them, and thou, my child, shalt either go with me unto a place where thou shalt toil at unseemly tasks, labouring before the face of some harsh lord, or else some Achaian will take thee by the arm and hurl thee from the battlement, a grievous death. . . . And woe unspeakable and mourning hast thou left to thy parents, Hector, but with me chiefliest shall grievous pain abide. For neither didst thou stretch thy hands to me from a bed in thy death, neither didst speak to me some memorable word that I might have thought on evermore as my tears fall night and day."[1]

Andromache's foreboding was only too completely fulfilled, for although Homer does not tell us of it, we know that when the truce for Hector's funeral was over Troy fell into the hands of the Greeks. The horrors of that day are related over and over again by the poets—the ruthless massacre of Priam and his sons, the capture of the women and children, and the burning of the city. Euripides tells us in his *Troades* what befell Andromache. This drama, written centuries after the *Iliad*, has been called by Professor Gilbert Murray, "the first great expression of pity for mankind in European literature." The subject was, indeed, one to evoke profoundest pity, and the poet,

reflective and humane, seems to select it purposely to reveal the dreadful underside of war. He brings the figure of Hecuba upon the stage, weighed down under innumerable woes: Cassandra too, in a dark prophetic frenzy, foretelling her own doom and that of Agamemnon: Helen, confronted at last by Menelaus; and Andromache, borne in the chariot of her captor, with the baby Astyanax in her arms.

But the crowning horror remains. As Andromache and the Queen are taking mournful leave of each other a hurried messenger arrives from the Greek leaders. His message is almost too dreadful to utter; but he stammers it at last—the victors have resolved that Andromache's son must die. They will spare no slip of Priam's stock to be a future menace; and Astyanax is to be cast down therefore from the city towers.

To Andromache it is an appalling blow, worse than all that she has yet suffered. She cannot realize it at first, and answers the herald in broken, incredulous phrases. But when the man, ruefully trying to soothe her meanwhile, at last makes it clear to her that her child must die, all her gentleness is suddenly swept away in fierce wrath against her enemies.

Her own wrongs, though deep and shameful, she could bear; but the cruelty to her child is insupportable. All the graciousness and dignity of her nature break down under it; and carried beyond herself she calls down wild curses upon her conquerors, and upon Helen, the origin of all her woes. Then, suddenly realizing the futility of her

rage and her powerlessness to save Astyanax, she yields him to the Herald in a poignant outburst of grief:

> "*Quick! take him: drag him: cast him from the wall,*
> *If cast ye will! Tear him, ye beasts, be swift!*
> *God hath undone me, and I cannot lift*
> *One hand, one hand, to save my child from death!*"[2]

So Andromache was taken alone into captivity. Of all that befell her there we do not know; but there are hints and fragments which suggest that the gods must have relented a little, at sight of her misery. For long afterward, when the Trojan prince Æneas set out to found another Troy in Latium, he anchored his fleet one day in the bay of Chaonia. And there, as he wandered upon the shore, he found Andromache. Her cruel captor was dead; and she was married to Helenus, the brother of Hector. But she had not forgotten her hero-husband, and when Æneas and his companions came upon her first she was paying devotions at his tomb.

[1] From Messrs Lang, Leaf, and Myers's translation of the *Iliad* (Macmillan and Co., Ltd.). 1909 edition.

[2] From Professor Gilbert Murray's translation of the *Troades* (George Allen and Unwin, Ltd.).

Homer: Penelope

WE come now to the *Odyssey*, the second Homeric epic; and to its heroine, wise Penelope.

Nominally, we have left the *Iliad* behind by a space of several years. Troy had fallen, and the Greeks were homeward bound, fewer in number and sadder at heart than when the fleet had sailed ten years before. Some few of them reached home in safety. But for the most part, the return voyages were only accomplished with tremendous hardship and peril; and many who had escaped death at Troy found it at the hands of Poseidon, earth-shaking sea-god. Of proud Agamemnon, and the fate that awaited him in his palace at Mycenæ, we shall hear presently. We are concerned now with the wanderings of Odysseus, and how he won home at last to the faithful love of Penelope.

But after all, the connexion between the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* is only nominal. The links between them, although they seem strong and real at first, do not in any sense unite the two poems. It is true that there is the imaginary relation of time; that the *Odyssey* relates the subsequent adventures of one of the heroes who actually fought at the siege of Troy; and, more important still, that it shows him to possess upon the whole the same qualities which he possessed in the *Iliad*. But when that

is said, there remains the fact of a contrast between the poems which almost persuades us that in the *Odyssey* we are in a different world. This contrast is best seen in the antithesis between the two heroes of the poems; and indeed between the two great heroines too. In the *Iliad*, Achilles stands for physical beauty and strength, young enthusiasm and ardent courage. When Odysseus appears there, as he sometimes does, he is overshone by the splendour of Achilles. Although he is the brain of the enterprise, he is in quite a secondary place to the physical magnificence of the younger hero. When we come to the later poem, however, we find that intelligence has risen to the higher plane. Odysseus is now the hero —not, like Achilles, an ideal of bodily strength and beauty: not a man of wrath, flaming over the battlefield in vengeance for his friend: not merely a warrior, product of a warlike age. Odysseus is by no means lacking in courage; and he has not outgrown the need for war. But he has many other qualities besides, and his fighting is usually prompted by necessity.

It is significant that the character of Achilles is developed in conflict with the war-god, Ares; while Odysseus is whelmed in a "sea of troubles," literally heaped upon him by Poseidon. Struggling constantly against the rage of the elements, Odysseus becomes alert and cautious, patient and painstaking and resourceful: a great constructive energy, as contrasted with the destroying fury of Achilles. The poet's epithet for Odysseus is 'subtle' as that for Achilles had been 'swift'; and the emphasis

is always laid upon his qualities of brain and nerve. He is not a very imposing figure, and has little physical beauty. When his friends would praise him, it is gifts of mind rather than of body to which they refer. He is "the just one" who does no injury "as is the way of princes"; the kindly ruler, who is "like a father" to help his people; the faithful husband who can flatter and cajole his goddess-gaoler, in desperate anxiety to be home with his dear wife; the loyal comrade who will risk the enchantments of Circe rather than forsake his men without an effort; the gracious master whose servants "mourn and pine" because of his long absence. And all the way through the poem, in passages which are too numerous to quote, there is a running tribute to his wisdom. Zeus himself, with other gods and goddesses; kings and queens; nymphs, naiads, and enchantresses; swineherds and domestic servants; soldiers and sailors; strangers and homefolk; friends and enemies, all add their word to the eulogium of his wit.

Now Penelope, who is the perfect mate for such a man as this, is for that very reason contrasted with Helen as strongly as her husband is contrasted with the hero of the *Iliad*. It is not merely that her personality is totally unlike Helen's, although that is true. The contrast is rooted in something deeper—in the whole conception of the poet, the manner of life out of which the poem came, the theme of which it treats. In the *Iliad* we are quite literally moving amongst demi-gods. Helen, reputed daughter of Tyndareus, is really the child of Zeus;

and Achilles has the nereid Thetis for his mother. Something of their divine origin clings to them, making them awful and magnificent. In all that they do and are they are greater than mere human folk. They move majestically, and they are not to be approached too nearly, or judged by the common standard, or compared with the ordinary race of men. Troy itself, to which their names cling, was a city built by gods.

But Odysseus and Penelope are frankly mortal; and in that one fact they approach nearer to us by many degrees. They are no longer colossal figures hovering, as it were, about the base of Mount Olympus, and driven this way and that in the surge of Olympian quarrels. They are a man and woman, with their feet firmly planted upon the earth, and their affections rooted there too. They claim no kinship with the gods: they take no part in Olympian warfare: they have no care for the issues which are called great. Their story, reduced to its elements, is of the simplest kind: the call of dear home ties upon the man, the fidelity and prudence of the woman. And in this "touch of common things," Penelope becomes a much more real figure than Helen.

Of course that is not to say that Penelope is 'real' in the technical sense of the word. She is in fact almost as much a creature of romance as Helen is. But she appears before us as a living woman with human hopes and joys and sorrows; with human virtues too, and certain very human weaknesses. We can never regard the heroine of the *Iliad* just in this way. If we could, and if we dared

to lift the veil which the poet always interposes between us and the character of Helen, it would stand revealed slight and trembling in its amiability: fatally soft, with no vein of essential strength. Now it is that essential strength which characterizes Penelope. The wooers realized it; and Antinous made it the chief point of his defence.

There is a significant silence about Penelope's beauty; and she has not eternal youth, as Helen has. But when we have seen her eyes light upon her boy Telemachus, and the radiance of her face as the strange old beggarman told her about her husband, we shall waive the question of æsthetics. We shall be prepared to maintain Penelope's beauty against all-comers; and we shall not be much concerned that the poet rather avoids the subject. For he would not dream of a soul which did not know that sweetness and dignity and a gentle heart, grief endured patiently and love unswerving, would make for themselves a worthy habitation. Beside Helen's exquisite fairness, Penelope would seem a little faded; and her sweet gravity would be almost a reproach. She cannot compare for one moment with Calypso, as Odysseus had to confess when the goddess blamed him for his homesickness.

The keynote of the *Odyssey* is struck here; and here too we may find a hint of all that Penelope means. The thought of home is to dominate the poem, as something so dear and sacred that innumerable toils are suffered and infinite perils undergone to win back to it. And this

shining ideal of home is to be incarnate in Penelope. She is to represent in her own person all that sweetens and comforts life: all the domestic virtues which establish and perpetuate it. Thus, beside Helen as the ideal of beauty —of physical perfection—Penelope stands as the ideal of mental and moral worth.

Telemachus, whom Odysseus had left at home as a baby twenty years before, had been sent by Athena to seek his father. The goddess had appeared to him as he sat in his father's hall in Ithaca, lowering upon those unbidden guests who were his mother's suitors. She had asked what the unseemly revel might mean; and he had told of the long absence of his father.

The goddess counselled immediate action—to go and seek Odysseus; and while the minstrel sang to the carousing suitors, Telemachus inwardly resolved that he would set sail as soon as might be for Pylos and Sparta, whither Athena directed him for tidings of his father. But he knew that he must act quietly; and, above all, that his purpose must be kept a secret from his mother. She would certainly prevent his going, did she know, fearing to lose son as well as husband.

Meantime, as he pondered the matter, Penelope was listening from her lofty bower to the minstrel's song in the hall below. He sang of the return of the heroes from Troy; and the words reawakened in her the old pain of longing for her husband. At last she could not bear to hear it any longer. She is a touching figure, as she

ventures out among the revellers and begs the old man to change the theme of his lay. But Telemachus was not in the mood to see the pathos of the scene. The charge that Athena had laid on him had suddenly given him his manhood; and in the new sense of responsibility, he spoke a little harshly to his mother, bidding her go back to her loom and housewifery.

Full of amazement she turned her to go to the women's apartment,
Hiding the masterful words of her son deep down in her bosom.
So to her upper apartment ascending with maiden attendants
Here she lamented Odysseus her well-loved husband, till gently
Slumber was poured on her lids by the grey-eyed goddess Athene.[2]

While his mother slept, Telemachus lay awake in his own inner room revolving plans whereby to carry out the command of Athena. He determined first to confront the suitors publicly, before a formal assembly of the Ithacans, and charge them with their insolence and riotous greed. So, with the first light of morning, he summoned the people to a meeting in the market-place, and called upon the wooers to cease their persecution of his mother and quit his house. Antinous, answering haughtily for them all, invented a coward's excuses for their conduct. Penelope was to blame, he said, for she would not decide between them; but constantly put them off with various

cunning devices. With one pretext alone—that of weaving a shroud for Icarius—she had kept them in suspense for many months.

Thus then all of the day at the spacious loom she was weaving;
During the night she unravelled the web with the torches beside her.
Three long years with her secret device she befooled the Achæans;
Till, when the fourth year came, and as season was followed by season,
Then at the last (since one of her women, who knew it, had told us),
While at the loom her magnificent web she unravelled, we caught her.
Thus was she forced, though sorely unwilling, to finish her labour.[2]

Therefore, declared Antinous, because Penelope had deceived them in this manner, they would not depart until she had chosen a husband from among them. Telemachus might spare his protests; indeed, he would be better advised to coerce his mother, since they were determined to remain in his house and devour his substance, until Penelope should yield. But Telemachus was a child no longer, and could not be threatened with impunity. And to their base suggestion that he should favour them against his mother, he gave a spirited reply. Nothing should induce him to give Penelope in marriage against her will.

The assembly broke up; and Telemachus hastily fitted out a ship and sailed to seek Odysseus, all unknown to Penelope. The suitors continued their carousals day after day, rioting and making merry, in feigned contempt of Telemachus and his quest. But when after a time he did not return, they grew uneasy. They had jeered at his threats of vengeance, deeming him an untried boy; but who knew what might happen now, since he had sailed with a crew of the stoutest fellows in the island? Might he not return with help and drive them out? Antinous took counsel with his friends, and determined on a murderous plan. They would man a ship, sail after Telemachus, and lie in wait for his return, between the islands of Ithaca and Samé; and that should be the last cruise that Telemachus should make.

Meanwhile Penelope, busy with her household duties, believed her son to be away with the flocks. She stayed within the women's rooms; and except for the clamour of the wooers, or the occasional song of the minstrel, nothing came to her ears. But now Medon the herald heard of the plot which was afoot against his young master, and came to warn her of it. She greeted him with a bitter question. Had he come to order her maids to spread the banquet for the suitors? Would that they might never feast again! Had they not shame to deal so unjustly with her absent husband—he who had always dealt justly with them, who had never in word or deed done injury to any? But Medon had a harder thing

yet to say; and as gently as might be, he told her of the going of Telemachus and of the suitors' plot to slay him.

Penelope is overwhelmed with grief, and Medon's explanation of her son's errand does not soothe her. She believes that he is lost to her for ever, like his father; and when the herald has left her, she throws herself down upon the floor of her room, wailing.

She casts about in her mind as to how she may save her son; and it seems to her best to send a trusty messenger to the father of Odysseus, for help and counsel. But the old nurse Euryclea gives good advice. She confesses that she had known of the departure of Telemachus; but he had sworn her with a great oath not to reveal it. It is of no use to mourn about it; and since they can do nothing to bring him back, the better way is to go and supplicate their guardian goddess, Athena, the Maid of Zeus, for his safety. For her part, she believes that Telemachus will not be forsaken in his need. Penelope wisely takes the advice of the old nurse. She bathes, puts on clean raiment, and taking in her hand an offering of barley-flour, she ascends to her own chamber and makes supplication to Athena.

Even while Penelope prayed, Athena was busy on her behalf; and was bringing home to her both husband and son. Odysseus she had convoyed safely to Ithaca, and was now leading him in disguise to the swineherd's cottage. And to Telemachus she had shown a way to escape the murderous suitors, and was bringing him

swiftly to the father whom he had never seen. Of their meeting, and of their cunning plan for vengeance on the suitors, it would take too long to tell. But in the morning, Penelope was gladdened by the return of her son; and a little later, a poor old beggar (no other than Odysseus himself) came among the suitors as they sat in the hall. They glowered upon him angrily, and proud Antinous set the vagabond Irus to fight him, for their sport. But the old beggar had unexpected strength, and Irus was defeated. Whereon the suitors began to bait Odysseus with jeers and taunts; and one hurled a stool at him. At this impious deed, the guests were horrified; and Penelope, hearing of it where she sat among her women, longed to make amends to the old man for the cruel act. She descended into the great hall, and spoke reprovingly to Telemachus for allowing one who had sought the shelter of their home to be treated so basely.

But Telemachus hugged his secret knowledge of the beggar's identity, and kept silence, while Penelope returned to her bower. The hall was cleared at last, and then he and his father laid their plans for the slaying of the suitors on the following day. The noisy crew had all gone to rest; and when Odysseus and his son had agreed upon a plan of action, Telemachus followed them, leaving his father alone in the great hall. It was a moment for which Penelope had been waiting; and she came down from her room again, to question the beggar of his wanderings. There was no light in the hall but that of the fire; and she ordered a cushioned chair to be

PENELOPE
Patten Wilson

brought near, so that the old man might sit while she talked with him.

> "*Firstly of all, O stranger, I wish thee to answer a question:*
> *Whence and what mortal thou beest? Tell too of thy city and parents.*" [2]

Cunning Odysseus evaded her question. She might ask him anything but that, he said; for it gave him too much sorrow to think of his country and his race. Penelope was only too willing to be turned aside, burning as she was to ask for news of Odysseus. So she told the old man of her husband, and of his sailing for Troy, and of how she was pining for his return.

She told him about the wooers, and the device of the shroud, which gained her three years' respite. But a treacherous servant had betrayed her, and she had been compelled to finish her task.

But having related so much of her own story, she asked again for the old man's name and race; and, above all, would not he say whether he had seen or heard aught of her husband? Odysseus needed all his subtlety now, as he invented a tale of Crete and the great city of Cnossos, and Minos the King who was his ancestor; and how on one occasion her husband had indeed taken shelter with him there.

There was one thing more which Odysseus must do before he could reveal himself; and meantime he could only comfort Penelope by assuring her that her husband

still lived and was even now on his way home to her. She shook her head sadly: that was too good to believe: the kind old man was only trying to comfort her. But it was time for him to go to bed; and because he disliked the giddy young serving-maids, Penelope called up the old nurse Euryclea, and bade her wash the beggar's feet with as much care as if he were her master returned at last. That he was indeed her master the nurse divined the instant that her fingers touched an old scar upon his foot. But Odysseus hastily whispered her to say nothing of what she had discovered; and soon the palace was asleep, with the old beggar stretched upon sheepskins in the forecourt.

At dawn next morning Odysseus awoke, and prayed to Zeus to help him in the great deed that he was to do that day. Soon the suitors were astir, and the usual preparations were begun for the banquet. Penelope herself came down from her room, to watch what would happen. For, as she had told the beggar the night before, she could not withhold her decision any longer. This day she must choose between the suitors. And because they were all alike hateful to her she would decide the question by a test: she would consent to take for her husband that man who could shoot with Odysseus's bow.

She went up into the high Treasure-chamber, and sorrowfully took down the great bow that a friend in Sparta had given to Odysseus long ago. She carried it forth among the suitors; and Telemachus, who was eager for the contest which he knew would end for them in a shameful death, swiftly set up the twelve axes in a row,

through which they were to shoot. Odysseus leaned silently against the doorpost, still in his beggar's disguise; whilst one after another of the suitors tried to bend the bow. But one after another miserably failed to bend it, although a great fire was lit and a cake of lard was brought to make the bow supple. At last, in rage and despair, they had to abandon the attempt; and then Odysseus humbly asked if he might be allowed to try. This was a pre-arranged signal between father and son; and in the instant outcry that arose at the old man's presumption, Penelope and her maids were led away. Then Odysseus, with his son and two faithful serving-men who were in the secret, made a bold attack upon the suitors. They were greatly outnumbered, but their plans had been laid warily, and Athena was on their side. Through a grim struggle they prevailed at last, and did not cease until vengeance was complete and every evil suitor had been slain. But Penelope, although she heard the horrible din in the hall below, had no idea of its cause. It was probably, she thought, another of the frequent brawls between these tumultuous wooers. She was still completely ignorant of Odysseus's return; and when the old nurse came running to her with the joyful news, she believed her to be mad. She had looked so long and so despairingly for this event that now it had come she was utterly incredulous. Even when she heard all the ghastly story of the slaying of the suitors, and came into the hall where her husband stood awaiting her, she could not realize that it was he.

Telemachus could not comprehend the reason for his

mother's silence, and broke into impulsive chiding. He could not see that the very steadfastness of her nature would not allow her to be lightly convinced.

> *Then answer made Penelope the wise:*
> *"My child, the soul is dizzy with surprise*
> *Within me! no word can I speak to him,*
> *Nor question him nor look him in the eyes.*
>
> *"But if he comes indeed, and this is he,*
> *We shall know one another certainly.*
> *For we have tokens that from all men else*
> *Are hidden, and none know but only we."* [1]

Truly, it is Greek meeting Greek, in this encounter between the wit of Penelope and that of the man she dare not hope is really her husband. Odysseus grows angry at last, and that gives the victory to his wife. For when he orders that a bed shall be made for him apart, she says cunningly to the maid:

> *"Now, Eurycleia, lay the goodly bed*
> *Without the chamber firmly-stablished*
> *That his own hands made: take it out from thence,*
> *You and the women, and upon it spread*
>
> *The broidered blankets, that he soft may lie,*
> *And rugs and fleeces."* [1]

Now Odysseus had built the bed himself, literally round the trunk of a standing tree; and by this token she is trying him. In his answer she perceives that he truly is

her husband, for none but he could know how wonderfully their bed was built.

Odysseus is indignant at the suggestion that his wonderful handiwork has been destroyed; but Penelope does not mind about his anger, for she is convinced at last that he is indeed her husband.

Odysseus's anger quickly melts as he clasps his sweet wife in his arms; and so we may leave Penelope in her happiness. Homer has one word more to say about her, however. It occurs, with apparent *naïveté*, almost like a curious little afterthought, in the last book of the poem. But there is really exquisite art in it. The souls of the suitors have gone wailing on their way to the World of the Dead; and there they meet the great Greek heroes who died at Troy. There too, they meet the haughty spirit of King Agamemnon, murdered by his wife on his return to Mycenæ. To him the suitors tell their tale of the faithful wife of Odysseus, and their ignominious end. And then from Agamemnon's lips, bitterly contrasting his wife with Penelope, falls what is perhaps the noblest and most impressive tribute to her:

> *"O fortunate Laertes' son,*
> *Odysseus many-counselled, who a wife*
> *So virtuous and so excellent have won!*
>
> *"How rightly minded from of old was she,*
> *Icarius' child, unblamed Penelope!*
> *How well remembered she her wedded lord*
> *Odysseus! Therefore undecayed shall be*

"Her fame for worth, among mankind so long
Shall the immortals make a lovely song
Of chaste Penelope." [1]

[1] From Professor J. W. Mackail's translation of the *Odyssey* (John Murray).

[2] From H. B. Cotterill's translation of the *Odyssey* (Harrap and Co., Ltd.).

Homer: Circe

PENELOPE is not the only woman in the *Odyssey*, although she is far the most prominent. Round her are grouped three other woman-figures—Calypso, Circe, and Nausicaa; and although two of them are goddesses rather than women, they seem none the less deliberately chosen, with the sweet youthfulness of Nausicaa, to enhance the dignity of Penelope.

They come into the story as incidents in the adventures of Odysseus, as he is driven from point to point on his weary voyage homeward. Calypso and Circe, dwelling each in a lonely island of the sea, lure him and hold him from Penelope against his will. But it is of no avail to change his purpose. They have many charms, and they can sing sweetly to ease the heart from pain. They live a dainty and a joyous life, which he may share if he will; and which he does share for a time. They are more beautiful than Penelope; they have strange lore, and a knowledge of enchantments; they have, too, eternal youth and kinship with the immortals. But when all is said, they cannot compare with the dear human soul who is waiting for Odysseus in Ithaca; and this contrast the poet makes us clearly see, in the way in which Odysseus always turns with longing to the thought of Penelope.

So it is, too, with Nausicaa. This fresh young daughter

of King Alcinous, just a fair mortal girl, might be Penelope's very self, when twenty years before Odysseus had taken away Icarius's child to be his wife. One would think that there must be something quite irresistible about her to the toil-worn man just escaped from death. She is so brave and helpful; and so prudent too, as she tells him a little wistfully that he must not enter the city in her company. Yet, though we feel that Odysseus cannot but admire this spirited young creature, she does but serve to remind him of one in whom similar beauty and wisdom have grown to maturity.

Thus we have another comparison from which Penelope gains; and thus all three of these other women of the *Odyssey* serve to throw the heroine into stronger relief. The poet accomplishes this very cunningly. He does not bring them into direct contact with Penelope: they are never, so to speak, on the stage together. That would be too severe a contrast—one from which Penelope would suffer, as well as they. But at distant times and places, each is brought separately into the circle of Penelope's life, by rivalry for the love of her husband. So they stand in the poem, not only as a graceful setting to the figure of the heroine; but they occupy in relation to Odysseus the same position which the suitors occupy in relation to Penelope. There is a perfect balance of the poem here, and one can only marvel at the art which built it so. For the suitors serve on the one hand to show Penelope's fidelity; and on the other hand, by their arrogance and brutality, they make a complete foil to the just and subtle

Odysseus. Penelope cannot cope with them; she knows them too well to dare the effect of a downright refusal; and she sets her wits to work to keep them at bay, while she longs and prays for her husband's return. In conflict with them, her loyalty shines; and there are developed all her many merits as queen and housewife and mother. But in the conflict we get at the same time, through their sensuality and impiousness, a sense of the absolute contrast with Odysseus.

The three minor women of the *Odyssey* serve a similar double purpose. They stand to the hero as the suitors stand to Penelope. If Odysseus's loyalty to his wife does not come perfectly scathless through the ordeal—if we cannot hold him entirely blameless for the year spent with Circe—the test does nevertheless reveal his essential constancy. That is indeed the poet's purpose; as well as to give a bright and graceful touch to an exciting story of adventure. But he had also another purpose, which we have already seen—to make of these rivals of Penelope a charming setting, in which she should shine with added lustre.

We hear all about Circe when Odysseus is telling the story of his adventures to King Alcinous. He relates how he had sailed a second time from Æolia, sadly and wearily, because of the folly of his men. For they had been well within sight of their beloved Ithaca, and Odysseus, worn out with his long vigil at the main-sheet, had dropped asleep. It was an evil opportunity for the curious crew, who were burning to know what was contained in the

great skin sack that their commander had stored below so carefully. Within a trice the Bag of the Winds was cut, letting loose on them havoc and destruction.

They fared back to King Æolus, and humbly begged his help once more. But he would not a second time labour to imprison the winds for men on whom the gods had obviously laid a curse of foolishness; and they had to sail away unfriended. For six days they rowed hard against adverse weather; and on the seventh their evil fortune lured them to the land of the Læstrygonians. Not one of the ships that entered the harbour ever came out again. Only Odysseus and his own men, who lay outside awaiting them, were saved from the hands of that cruel race.

Such was the coming of Odysseus to the land of Circe; and of all the strange and terrible things that had yet befallen him, the strangest and most terrible he was to receive at her hands. At first all went well. The ship ran smoothly into a fair haven: they landed in safety, and for two days and nights they rested on the shore, Odysseus himself shooting them venison for their food. In all this time no human creature had been seen; but Odysseus in his explorations had seen one sign of habitation—a curl of smoke rising from an oaken coppice. That gave at least some hope of succour; but when he called his men to search the wood with him, he found that their courage had been completely broken. Their sufferings from the savage Cyclops and the Læstrygonians had taught them to fear the unknown rather than to hope from it; and

none would volunteer for the expedition. So a council was called, lots were cast, and those on whom the lots fell went off most unwillingly, led by Eurylochus.

The island lay low upon the sea, with only one hill-peak; and when they climbed the hill the circling waters could be seen stretching away to the horizon's edge, without another glimpse of land. It would seem that they were utterly cut off: that there was no possible succour anywhere but in the mysterious valley below them; and the knowledge spurred them to seek out the dweller in the wood, and so perhaps find help and counsel.

In a wide and shallow valley, where the oaks had been cleared away and the sun streamed hotly upon a southern slope, they came upon the house of Circe, daughter of the Sun. No human figure could be seen:

> *But beasts alone,*
> *Hill-wolves and lions, over whom the witch*
> *With evil drugs had her enchantment thrown.*[1]

Even these creatures made no sound to break the silence that was like a menace, while the sailors stopped awe-struck at the sight. The great house, with its many halls and shining marble pillars, fascinated their sight; and the strange beasts which leapt and fawned around them seemed to invite them to enter. But while they stood in doubt, dreading to advance and yet withheld from flight by some impalpable, resistless power, the sound of a sweet voice rose upon the air. Softly at first it floated out to them, in trembling notes; and they stole forward, drawn

by the exquisite melody, until they stood upon the very threshold of Circe's house.

Circe, with a lurking smile of malice on her lips, came forward to welcome them. She was very lovely, with the youthful, changeless beauty of the immortals; but though Homer does not tell us so, we know that there was sensuality in the curving fullness of her mouth and a cruel gleam in the eyes over which the white lids drooped. With sweet words and fluttering movements of her soft hands, she brought them in and bade them sit; and busied herself, with swift and stealthy eagerness, to mix and pour a luscious drink of Pramnian wine and honey. But before she gave the cup into their hands, she furtively dropped into it one of her secret baneful drugs; and as they greedily drank, their human shape was instantly transformed to that of swine.

One of the crew, however, had not entered; and when his comrades did not return, he ran back to the ship to tell of what had happened. Odysseus, suspecting some evil, slung on his sword, seized his bow, and sped away to Circe's house. But suddenly in his path stood the god Hermes, Messenger of Zeus, in the likeness of a handsome youth. The god held up an arresting hand, and then foretold all that should befall Odysseus in Circe's house, thinking to deter him. But when he would persist in the attempt to save his men, the god gave Odysseus a plant that should be an antidote to Circe's poison.

Below her courtesy an evil intent was lurking, as

Odysseus knew too well; and presently she served to him the same poisoned drink with which she had bewitched his men. But the plant of moly that Hermes had given him made him proof against her drugs. The wine failed of its effect, and Circe, angrily taking her wand, smote Odysseus with it, crying: "Begone now to the sty and couch among your band."

Her mischievous purpose faded on the instant, and she became full of fawning admiration and wonder. Her malice was changed; but something even more dangerous took its place. She began with sweet words to smooth away Odysseus's anger, fondling him and begging him to remain with her and be her husband. But Odysseus remembered the warning of the god, and at first he would not yield. He was sullen and suspicious, and would not answer her gently until she had sworn to release his men.

Thereat immediately
Out through the palace, rod in hand, went she,
And opened the sty-doors and drave them out
Resembling swine of nine years old to see.

Thereafter all in front of her stood they,
While she passed down along their whole array,
Smearing another drug on each of them;
And off their limbs the bristles fell away,

That the first baleful drug from Circe's store
Had made to grow upon them: and once more
Men they became, and younger were to see
And taller far and goodlier than before.

Then the ship was hauled into a cave, and their companions were induced to come up to Circe's house, where they all joined in feasting and merriment. Cautious Eurylochus tried to dissuade them; but Odysseus would give no heed to his warning; and there followed a long interval of riotous pleasure over which Circe and the river-nymphs who were her handmaidens presided as queens. The days went by uncounted in luxurious ease; and if, in rare moments, Odysseus had an uneasy flash of memory, Circe's caressing voice would flatter and soothe him into complacence again, persuading him to stay yet a little longer.

For a whole year the thought of home and friends was driven away, while jollity filled out the indolent hours. But satiety came at last, and memory began to reawaken. With rough home-truths, the sailors broke the spell that Circe had cast upon their commander. They called him out from her odorous, shadowy halls; and under the clear sunlight that suddenly made Circe hateful, they reproached him with his dalliance, and bade him flee at once if he would save his soul alive. There was no withstanding them; and indeed Odysseus had no wish to do so.

When evening came, he claimed from Circe the fulfilment of her promise to send them safely back. . . . He would be sad at leaving her, he said, since the time had passed so pleasantly in her sunny island; but now his men are beginning to complain and he himself (though that he did not tell her) had suddenly grown weary and remorseful. It all seemed very simple: and he had not much mis-

giving. Circe had only to speak the word, that they might have safe convoy, and return to Ithaca. Surely the gods must have laughed in irony at the man who thought to part from Circe so lightly, knowing as they did the whole cost of that parting for him. Circe was not to be cast off and forgotten, as a mere incident of Odysseus's adventures. Her reply was proud, and of ominous import. Since they wished to go, she would not detain them; but let Odysseus summon all his courage:

> "*Not against your will*
> *You and your fellows longer shall abide*
> *Within my house; but you must first fulfil*
>
> "*Another journey yet, the house to see*
> *Of Hades and renowned Persephone.*" [1]

The awful words fell horribly on Odysseus's ear. So they might not then simply hoist sail and away, gaily bound for Ithaca? Instead, there was yet to make the bitterest voyage that even Odysseus had made—a dark and awesome journey to the nether world, there to see and hold converse with the dead prophet, Tiresias.

So it was decreed, and since all his grief and horror could not alter it, he begged of Circe at least to tell him how he might find his way to the dread World of the Dead, and how he might return in safety from it. Circe smiled inscrutably. She knew that the passage there is all too easily won.

She told him all that he must do there; how he must

pass right through the crowding shadowy forms, and where two loud-thundering rivers meet he must dig a trench and pour out a drink-offering before the dead. But he must not let them partake of it, and must keep them at bay with drawn sword till the prophet Tiresias should appear and prophesy to him of his return.

So spake she, and Dawn straightway rose and shone
Gold-throned; and in my shirt and cloak anon
I clad me, and the nymph herself a great
White mantle, thin and beautiful, put on;

And round her loins a golden girdle fair
She drew, and cast a kerchief on her hair;
But I throughout the house to every man
Went with soft words, and bade my crew prepare.[1]

The crew set cheerily to work, but they did not know all yet; and when Odysseus told them of the dreadful voyage they had now to make at the bidding of the goddess, they were filled with despair. Perhaps Circe too was ruthful at heart; and one act of grace at least she did them. For when all was ready to launch the ship, they found that an unseen hand had placed beside it the animals that they would need for sacrifices in the World of the Dead.

Circe did not say farewell, because she knew that they would meet again. For the first spirit to greet Odysseus when he reached the dark Underworld was the restless ghost of Elpenor, one of his own crew. In the hurry of their departure, Elpenor had fallen from a gallery and had

been killed. His untended body still lay in Circe's house, and the poor ghost could not rest until it was buried. So when the dreadful journey to the dead was accomplished, Odysseus sailed back to Ææa to perform the funeral rites.

Circe made Odysseus tell her all that had befallen him, and all that he had seen in the House of Hades; and then she gave him directions for his homeward voyage. He was to beware of the Syrens, and of Scylla and Charybdis; but above all he must prevent his men from doing injury to the sacred Oxen of the Sun.

When the ship was manned she came down to the sea to speed them away; and our last glimpse of her is as she stands upon the shore, her garments and the tendrils of her hair lightly fluttering, and her lovely body drawn to its height as she raises white arms and cries to the winds to follow them.

[1] From Professor J. W. Mackail's translation of the *Odyssey* (John Murray).

Homer: Calypso

CALYPSO is a statelier figure than Circe, although they have much in common. Both are immortals—Circe a daughter of the Sun, and Calypso a daughter of Atlas. Both are skilled in sorcery; both live on islands set far away amidst the sea; both are "fair-tressed" and beautiful and have sweet singing voices; both love Odysseus and desire him for a husband.

But our first thought is corrected the instant we look at the two goddesses a little more closely. We shall find that Calypso is gentler and more dignified; a sweeter and more gracious creature than Circe. There is nothing sinister or malign about her; and if she loves Odysseus, and strives to keep him at her side, it is that she may make him immortal, like herself. She has no evil intent toward him; and when the messenger of Zeus bids her to release him, she sets herself the task of helping him away. Odysseus has not now to pay a gruesome penalty for willing bondage, as when he left Circe in Ææa; but wins his way by Calypso's aid to the friendly land of Phæacia.

In a "far isle amid the sea" Calypso dwelt alone. The blue sky bent over it to embrace the bluer sea; and round its base a spray of foam perpetually laved the rocks with snowy fingers. Out of the sea tree-clad cliffs rose steeply,

and the scent of pines hung like incense in the warm air. Deep chasms here and there rent the cliffs apart, and gave access to the sea; but their sides were clothed with olives and trailing vines; and far down below could be heard the whisper of a little stream as it ran to join the murmuring waves on a strip of golden sand. At the head of one of the ravines was Calypso's cavern.

Here it was that Calypso first saw Odysseus. The prophecy of Circe had been fulfilled. His crew had impiously laid hands on the sacred Oxen of the Sun, and, smitten by an avenging storm sent by the wrathful Apollo, had every one paid the penalty with his life. Odysseus only had been spared; and for nine days and nights he had struggled alone with the waves on a shattered raft.

Calypso rescued and tended the shipwrecked man who was thrown upon her shores; and after his awful peril and hardship he was content to forget everything for a time. Days and weeks and months slipped quickly past and Odysseus remained, charmed by the beauty of the island and the gracious society of Calypso. Sometimes, reclined on the yellow sands where he had been washed ashore, she would listen eagerly to the tales of his wanderings. Sometimes, when the evening breeze blew chill from the sea, they would sit together in the cavern, and as Calypso sang her strange melodies in the fire-lit gloom, the memory of Ithaca and Penelope grew faint. But one day the spell was broken. Standing on a cliff and looking out to sea, he suddenly remembered home and wife and friends; and

from that time onward he did not cease to long and pray for release.

But year after year dragged wearily on, and Calypso tried by arts and endearments and promises of deathless gifts, to win him to stay with her. All her persuasion was fruitless, however, and Odysseus

> *Sitting far apart*
> *On the sea-beach, as oftentimes before,*
> *Fretted with tears and sighs and bitter smart,*
>
> *Out seaward to the barren ocean-rim*
> *Kept gazing, and his eyes with tears were dim.*[2]

Meanwhile, in high assembly of the gods upon Olympus, Athena the loyal friend of Odysseus stood out and pleaded his cause before them all. This austere daughter of great Zeus despised the wiles by which Calypso would keep the hero at her side; and begged her father to release him.

Zeus gently reproved his splendid daughter. Is it to be supposed that he has forgotten wise Odysseus, famed for his piety, and the constant friend of gods and men? But there are reasons—partly the foolishness and rashness of the hero and his men—why all these delays and reverses have fallen upon him; and but for Zeus they would have brought on him destruction long ago. Athena may set her mind at rest, however: the hour has come for his deliverance. The great Father of the Gods turned to his messenger:

Homer : Calypso

"Hermes,—for ever as herald thou bear'st the behests of immortals—
Bring to the fair-tressed nymph our will's immutable verdict,
Even that patient Odysseus return and arrive at his homeland. . . .
Thus is he fated his friends once more to revisit and once more
Win to his high-roofed home and arrive at the land of his fathers." [1]

Swift as light itself, Hermes sped down to Calypso's island and passed up through the flowering garden that embowered her cavern. He paused a moment before entering, to let his glance roam over the peaceful beauty of the scene and to breathe the delicious fragrance of the evening air.

Calypso greeted him gladly, not divining the cruel message that he was charged to deliver. And while she hospitably set before him the deathless food of the gods, she eagerly inquired the reason of his unwonted visit.

Hermes was reluctant to tell his errand, knowing the pain that it would cause Calypso; and not until the meal was over did he reveal it. He had come against his will, he said, with a decree of Zeus concerning the hero whom she is detaining in her island. Odysseus must be released.

The love of Calypso was something deeper than caprice. It was rooted in that heroic act when she had toiled to drag him up out of the fiercely beating surf, and had brought him back from the brink of death to the cheerful

light of day. She had given him his life, and her love with it; and ever since she had striven to keep him at her side, thinking to win his love in return. But she was no witch, to wreak evil spells over an unwilling heart; and though the blow that Hermes had dealt her was a bitter one, she replied with dignity. She would consent to the will of Zeus, not merely because he might not be withstood, but because it was her desire to do good to Odysseus.

So the Messenger of Zeus departed; and Calypso went sadly across the island to the spot where she knew Odysseus was sitting. As she came near she could see him, gazing out to sea, home-sick and despairing. So he had sat this many a day, turning from her in coldness or in anger to go and mourn for far-off Ithaca and his mortal wife. Why could he not be content to remain with her? Was Penelope then so very beautiful—more beautiful than she, a goddess? Had she not offered him immortality? Had she not lavished tenderness upon him? And now she knew that at the first word of her hateful news he would joyfully prepare to go, and leave her alone with her regret. As she came up and stood by his side, her heart was sore at the perversity of fate. But there was no rancour in it; and having given her word, she would fulfil it generously. So she put her hand upon his shoulder gently as he sat with averted face, and gave him the message of Hermes.

The great good news was too wonderful for Odysseus to believe. Bewildered and doubting, he forgot his usual

courtesy, and uttered an ungracious speech. Is she not deceiving him? Does she not intend some evil?

Odysseus had suffered so much at the hands of angry gods that he could not give credit to Calypso's generosity. He suspected her of anger too; and rather than risk the perils of an awful voyage like the last, he would remain here upon the island. His words would have embittered a smaller soul; but Calypso saw what was passing in his mind, and gave him the solemn oath of the great gods that he should receive no hurt.

He was convinced at last; and together they went back to the cavern for the evening meal. Calypso served to Odysseus his mortal food, and her handmaidens set before her the deathless wine of the immortals. And while they ate, she suddenly realized how soon she must part from him. Her brave mood faded as she thought how lonely she would be when he had gone; and thought too of the struggles which Odysseus had yet to make before he reached his home. Again the haunting question came—Why need he go at all? Why would he not stay with her? And though she knew there was no hope, she pleaded with him once more.

Odysseus had recovered his gallantry now. He begged Calypso not to be wroth with him for desiring to go, and acknowledged that Penelope was by no means so fair as she. As to the ill that he had still to suffer, he would incline his heart to endurance: "And now, let this too follow after, if it will."

Under his courteous manner lay a stern resolve; and as

soon as morning came, Calypso set herself to prepare his going. Though her heart was very sore, she helped him readily.

Odysseus wrought joyfully at the raft, building with infinite care and skill a strong, seaworthy vessel. Calypso brought out to him the store of fair cloth that she had woven upon her loom, and of this he made the sails, with "brace and sheet and halyard." When all the strenuous toil was completed, he drew the raft on rollers down to the sea and made ready to sail.

Now was the fourth day come, and all of his labour was ended;
So on the fifth day sped his departing the goddess Calypso,
Bathing him first and arraying him freshly in fragrant apparel.
Then to the raft she conveyed dark wine in a bottle of goat-skin
—One was of wine and another, a greater, of water—and viands
Stowed in a wallet; and many a toothsome relish she added.
Then did she send him a favouring breeze both gentle and kindly.[1]

So Calypso was left alone again on her little island; and Odysseus, speeding before a favouring wind, was too absorbed to give much thought to her. Freedom and the thought of home filled him with exultation; and all his care was bent to navigate the boat. But a grateful

memory of her survived in aftertimes; and often he would recall her words to him, when she had given him the vow of good faith.

[1] From H. B. Cotterill's translation of the *Odyssey* (Harrap and Co., Ltd.).

[2] From Professor J. W. Mackail's translation of the *Odyssey* (John Murray).

Homer: Nausicaa

NAUSICAA was the only daughter of Alcinous King of Phæacia. Young and beautiful, reared amid abundant wealth, the idol of parents and stalwart brothers, she is yet simple and sweet and quite unspoiled. Her father was lord over a rich sea-faring folk; a kindly, generous, impetuous man. Her mother, Queen Arete, was a star among women; so wise and noble that the people saluted her as a god, and Alcinous worshipped her with absolute devotion. Even the great goddess Athena had words of praise for Arete, when she met Odysseus on the road coming up from the harbour.

Nausicaa, as we shall see, is worthy of her parentage. The gods were gracious at her birth, and gave her the fine qualities of both father and mother. Yet courage and resource and a wise generosity sit lightly on the youthful figure that flits through the Sixth Book of the *Odyssey*. She is a mere girl, fresh and untried, with an irresistible gaiety of heart and a tender regard for home ties. Her changing moods and caprices are like dancing sunlight, and now and then there falls upon her a soft shadow of wistfulness, cast by the "long, long thoughts" of youth.

Her pretty head holds its own romantic visions, which she cannot, from girlish shyness, bring herself to talk about freely, even to the dear indulgent father. So for fear of his teasing and laughter, she practises a little

harmless deceit on him; which, however, does not deceive him in the least, because his love can look right through it.

So she moves before us, a creature of grace and beauty, of fineness and strength; but withal so happy and human that the thought of her has the bracing sweetness of upland meadows, or the breath of the summer sea. Yet it is this fresh young girl whom we have to consider for a moment as the unconscious rival of Penelope. The idea of such a rivalry seems absurd, in connexion with Nausicaa. And so it is, taken clumsily out of its setting and robbed of the poet's delicate art. Yet the suggestion is clear; and the marvel is that Homer has contrived to bring her out of the ordeal with her young innocence quite untouched. The beats of the love-god's wings only fan her in passing, and she is left unhurt by a single barb. For a happy instant she glimpses him in flight, and stretches a welcoming hand in naïve pleasure. But the moment after, he has fled in jewelled light and she is left, wondering and wistful, but scathless yet.

So Nausicaa lives, a peerless girl in Homer's group of immortal women. She has served his purpose in the epic plan—to link the story with Penelope and to enhance her dignified maturity. She has served too, in the strongest way, to accentuate the chivalry and constancy of the hero. But in doing this, the tenderest care has been taken that she shall not be despoiled of her exquisite charm.

Poseidon the Sea-god was still wrathful with Odysseus

for the injury done to his son, the Cyclops. But having gone on a long journey to the land of the "blameless Æthiopians," Athena had compassed in his absence the escape of the hero. He had sailed joyfully from Calypso's island, and for seventeen days had fared onward steadily, with a following wind. The wine and food that Calypso had given him were still unspent, when on the eighteenth day there loomed before him the island of Phæacia, vast and shadowy in the morning mist. Here, he knew, were friendly hands and hearts; people who had never been known to refuse safe convoy to distressed mariners. And Odysseus, feeling that now at last the end of his struggles had come, steered straight ahead. But he reckoned without Poseidon. For that angry god, speeding on his homeward journey from Æthiopia to Olympus, looked down from the mountains of the Solymi and spied the raft of Odysseus, making for the safety of a Phæacian harbour. Amazement smote him; then indignation, and then a furious desire for instant revenge. So this was what the immortals had been doing in his absence—plotting to befriend the man who had so foully mis-used his son. But no matter! If Athena must needs win in the end—and even the might of Poseidon could not eventually withstand her calm wisdom—her success should be at bitter cost to this artful rascal whom she favoured. So:

The clouds at his command
Gathered, and with the trident in his hand
He stirred the sea and roused the hurricane
Of all the winds, and blotted sea and land

Homer : Nausicaa

With clouds: night swept across the firmament:

. . . a monstrous wave abaft
Came towering up, and crashed into the raft:
And the raft reeled, and off it far he fell,
And from his hand shot out the rudder-shaft.[1]

It would take long to tell all that Odysseus suffered from that awful storm. Only the lion-heart that he was could have endured the terrible strain of it. The raft was lost, and for two days and nights the fury of the storm lashed him unceasingly. He was buffeted out of his course, and when at last a calm fell and he saw land ahead, he had only just enough strength left to strike out for it, with a great prayer in his heart for deliverance from the wrath of Poseidon.

It is this exciting incident, told with tremendous vigour, which is the prelude to the story of Nausicaa. For on the very night when the waves flung Odysseus ashore on her father's island, she had a strange dream. A goddess stood by her bedside, in the likeness of a girl friend; and with hints of a happy marriage, bade her rise and go down to the washing-pools.

We who are watching behind the scenes know quite well who is this celestial visitor; and that the whispered words which have set Nausicaa's cheeks tingling are a mere ruse of Athena to bring help to the luckless Odysseus. But Nausicaa has no hint of this; and waking with the morning sun streaming upon her, she smiles in wonder and hope. Then she dresses quickly and goes down to find her

parents, musing upon the words of the goddess. The Queen is sitting in the great hall, amid her handmaidens, winding the "dim sea-purple"; and the King, coming out to join the Princes in council, meets Nausicaa on the threshold. Is there anywhere a more charming scene than this?

"Papa dear, will you let me have to-day
A high wheeled waggon yoked, to take away
The goodly clothes and wash them in the stream?
For in the house all lying soiled are they.

"Now for yourself it is no more than fit
That, when the councillors at council sit,
In clean array among your lords you go:
Also your house has five sons born in it,

"Two of them wedded now, but three are yet
Young bachelors, who evermore must get
New-washed attire when to the dance they go;
And now on all this charge my mind is set."

So spake she, for her mouth for maiden shame
To her own father marriage might not name.
Howbeit he understood and answered her:
"Go, child: I grudge not any wish you frame,

"Mules or aught else: this thing my thralls shall do,
And yoke the high wheeled tilted wain for you." [1]

As we see, Alcinous can deny nothing to his fair young daughter. The lightly running mule-cart is ordered out, and Nausicaa and the maids set busily to work. It is

refreshing to see this only daughter of a 'king' carrying out the linen and fleecy blankets that have been daintily wrought with needlecraft by her own hands. Alcinous, of course, is not to be regarded as possessing the power and state of a modern monarch; perhaps he was not a king at all, in our sense of the word. But there can be no doubt that his state was that of a rich and mighty lord, for he lives in a magnificence which makes the simple practical usefulness of his daughter all the more remarkable. She helps the servants to load the wagon, while the Queen herself places upon the box a skin of wine and many dainty things to eat at their midday meal, together with a golden flask of oil for their use when they wish to bathe.

When all is ready Nausicaa drives off merrily, her women running at the side of the cart. Far out of the city they go, past the embattled walls and the market-place and the harbour: then on through farms and sloping, shimmering olive-gardens, until they reach the sea and the washing-pools—the very spot, in fact, where "toil-worn, bright Odysseus" is sleeping the sleep of exhaustion, after his heart-breaking struggle with the waves. The mules are unyoked and the clothes are brought out of the cart and flung into the dark water. Then the girls bare their white feet, catch up their fluttering garments, and tread the clothes in the gushing water, gaily chattering the while. When all are cleansed, they are spread out in the sun on the pebbly beach, while the girls bathe and take their dainty meal upon the shore.

All this while there lay in a thicket quite close to them, the prostrate figure of Odysseus, like one dead. But when the afternoon was wearing on, the girls joined in a merry game of ball, before starting on their homeward journey. The lovely group lives before us as we read, fresh from their sea-bath, with crisping ringlets floating, cheeks touched to a rosier hue by exercise and fun, and all the charms of youth and beauty revealed as white arms throw the ball and twinkling feet run hither and thither after it, upon the yellow sand.

This is the moment for which Athena has been waiting, to bring help to Odysseus, who is dazed by his long, long sleep. Where is he? What land is this? Whose are those young figures that he can just see by peeping through the leafy thicket in which he lies? Are they the nymphs of the river along which he was drifted out of the sea? Or are they human maidens who may be besought to help? He does not hesitate long. At all hazards he must speak to them, for he is in desperate need. So, hastily breaking off a leafy bough to hide his nakedness, he strode out of his lair. His uncouth figure struck amazement and terror into the hearts of the girls, who fled in dismay. Nausicaa alone stood and faced him.

For once Odysseus is at a loss. How shall he address her? He is almost naked, haggard, and sea-worn, a terrible object to girlish eyes. Shall he go up close, and in the attitude of the suppliant, clasp her knees? Or will not his touch and his close approach startle and shock her? But his wits are not long to seek. He decides that it will

be better not to come too near, but to address her gently, from a little distance. "I kneel to you, Protectress. God are you, or mortal?" So he speaks first, gracefully complimenting her beauty and courage.

When he goes on to relate at length about the dreadful voyage on the raft through the vengeful storms of Poseidon, she pities and longs to help him. She has gauged him shrewdly, too. This eloquent stranger, with his air of frank deference, is no rogue nor fool; but whoever and whatever he may be, he is a suppliant whom it is the will of Zeus to succour. So she speaks cheerily to him, to allay his anxiety, telling him that he is in the land of a friendly people, whose king, Alcinous, is her father. She will herself guide him to the palace and see that he is cared for. Then she turns to reproach the silly fears of her maids, bidding them stay and welcome the wanderer.

So 'Odysseus is bathed and clothed and fed; and Nausicaa, looking shyly at him as he reappears, is astonished at the wonderful change that has come over him.

A little timid hope is dawning in her heart. Is it possible that this may be the lover of whom she dreamed? But she will not let him know her thoughts; and as she offers to guide him to the city, she tells him with modest dignity that he must not ride with her in the wagon. He must follow behind with the maids; and when the city walls are in sight, and they are near the houses of men, he must draw away from them and continue his journey alone. She is not discourteous, she explains; but it is not

seemly for her to be seen by the people driving a strange man into the city.

But she gives him minute directions, so that he may find her father's palace after she has left him. He will pass Athena's grove, and the well, and the king's park, before he comes to the town and the gate of the palace. He is to go right into the palace, and not hesitate.

It all falls out as she has said. They start off as the sun is setting, and Odysseus follows behind the mule-cart at a little distance until they reach the sacred grove of poplars that Nausicaa has indicated. There he waits behind for a space, while she drives on to the palace. Her handsome young brothers come out to meet her, with hearty greetings and questions as to how the day has fared. But she does not make much response to them, leaving them to unharness the mules and carry out the clothing while she slips away to her room and the society of her old nurse.

Meanwhile Odysseus makes his way to the palace alone and is amazed at its size and magnificence.

To this gorgeous palace, Alcinous and Arete give Odysseus a royal welcome. They are charmed with their guest: and when the Queen, recognizing her handiwork on the robe that he is wearing, elicits an account of his meeting with Nausicaa, the King flames into anger.

> *Answered and said Alcinous: "Sooth to tell,*
> *Guest, in this thing my daughter did not well,*
> *That hither with her maids she brought you not*
> *Herself, since first before her feet you fell."*

And subtle-souled Odysseus answer made:
"Prince, on that faultless maiden be there laid
No blame herein: for with her hand-maidens
She bade me follow; but behind I stayed

"For fear of shame, lest haply should you see,
Your mind might deem some hateful thought of me." [1]

This is not exactly what had happened, as we know; but we do not love Odysseus any the less for the chivalrous lie. The most loving father can be unreasonable sometimes, and Alcinous would not have the sacred laws of hospitality broken, even for the maidenly prudence of his own sweet daughter. Impetuously he tries to make amends:

"Nay, O guest,
Not so is framed my heart within my breast,
To be stirred up to anger without cause.
In all things to observe the law is best.

"Fain were I—Zeus our Father hear me vow,
And thou, Athena, and Apollo, thou!—
Such as you are and minded as I am,
You took to wife my daughter even now,

"And were called son-in-law of me the king,
Abiding with us." [1]

But Nausicaa's dream was a lying vision; and the fine tact of Odysseus is sorely put to it to find words for the inevitable refusal. He is silent for a time; and then, beginning the recital of all his eventful story, he gradually reveals to them who he is, and tells about his home and the

gentle wife to whom he is longing to return. To the King and Queen his answer causes little regret. It means that they may keep their fair daughter a little longer; and are there not many Phæacian princes from whom they may choose a mate for her when she is ready? But Nausicaa, to whom the nurse brings word of what is passing as she sits in her beautiful chamber, hears the reply of Odysseus with a little pang that she has never felt before. It does not linger very long, however, and when the day comes for Odysseus's departure, and the guests are trooping into the hall for the last banquet in his honour, she steals out among them to bid him farewell. It is the last time we see her.

[1] From Professor J. W. Mackail's translation of the *Odyssey* (John Murray).

Æschylus: Clytemnestra

WE come now to the heroines of Attic Tragedy. The women of Homer, with all their romantic beauty and charm, gleam on us from a far distance. A new type of heroine has arisen, reborn out of the legends of the remote past into a new age; and evoked by a poetic genius which is greatly different from that of the Homeric epics.

In the interval which had elapsed since the epics were composed, civilization had advanced, life had grown more complex, and women had attained to a fuller and freer existence. It was the Great Age of Greece; and as in our own Elizabethan Age, the poetic genius of the time was impelled to find expression in dramatic form.

From all these causes, we shall find that the women of Attic Tragedy are possessed of a stronger and more vivid personality than their Homeric forerunners. They are resolute, purposeful, passionate—women of action as well as of feeling. Physical beauty they do possess, as well as grace and charm. Neither do they lack the gentler qualities which are usually supposed to be peculiarly feminine. Indeed, we could probably find an eminent example of every so-called feminine virtue if we went through the range of the heroines. But the stress is not now laid merely on beauty and the gentler graces. It is laid rather on a combination of these qualities with strength

of intellect and will, generous emotions, and a soaring spirit.

Sometimes the heroines of Greek Tragedy do very terrible things and are placed in situations of appalling horror. Those acts, and the circumstances out of which they spring, not only repel us but seem to be at variance even with the spirit of the poet himself. Sometimes the heroine is the victim of tyrannic physical force, and frequently again there is the clash of motive, for which death seems to be the only solution. Strange crimes, unheard of and almost unthinkable, sometimes darken the atmosphere around them. Age-old curses and hereditary feuds pursue them: the terrible gift of beauty weighs them down; and over all broods fate, a lurking, indefinable power against which, in the last resort, they are powerless to stand.

There is, then, sometimes in the heroines themselves and almost always in their environment, an element of barbarism which troubles us. The touch of savagery repels us all the more from its contrast with the exquisite poetry in which it is enshrined, and the noble spirit of that poetry. We wonder why the dramatist should have placed creatures so sensitive and highly wrought in situations which are so crudely appalling; and the incongruity is not shaken off until we remember the nature of the material upon which the poet is constrained to work. For the Attic dramatists went for the subjects of their poetry directly to stories out of the primitive past—old legends which, though sometimes very beautiful, nearly always

contain elements of cruelty and horror. The reason why they did this is interesting, and explains some curious points about Greek Drama.

To us it seems strange that these poets, whose ideas were probably as 'advanced' to their contemporaries as our modern Drama is to us, did not take their themes out of the vastly interesting and even momentous life of their own day. Very occasionally they did this, as we know from the drama of Æschylus called *The Persians*, which deals directly with that tremendous event of Greek history the Persian Invasion. But almost always, as we have said, they turned away from their own time, and looked back upon the ancient past for the subject-matter of Drama. It is probable that poetical motives influenced them to some extent—the same that made Milton turn back to the Hebrew story of the Creation, and Tennyson occupy himself for nearly fifty years with the Arthurian legend. But there was another, and more compelling reason; and it lay in the religious character of the Attic theatre.

Greek Drama was a ritual, performed in honour of the gods. It had its origin in the worship of the Thracian god Dionysus or in a still older cult of ancestor-worship; and it had an established convention that its themes should be taken from legendary heroic subjects. So that the poet, however he might modify character, was bound by tradition to the main outline of the early stories. As we shall see, he imbued those themes and characters with new significance. Just as Milton puts the Reformation spirit into the story of Adam and Eve, and Tennyson makes the

Arthur of Celtic legend into an ideal of modern gentlehood, Æschylus and Sophocles and Euripides vitalize the old legendary forms with the spirit of their own age. The spirit of that age was profoundly interested in religion—perhaps because it was beginning to lose its religion. It was passing out of unquestioning belief in the old Olympian hierarchy; but it had not yet attained to a new belief with any clearness. And an extremely interesting fact is that here in the drama, in the very cradle of religion, the new thought begins to manifest itself quite clearly, despite the trammels of convention. Each of the three tragedians represents some phase of it; each shows, in greater or less degree, evidence of the transition period in which old superstition was being broken down; but each steadily maintained, through the crash of falling faith, the sanctity of the moral law. It is this clear view, this austere purpose and steady aim at the highest, which gives Attic Tragedy its grandeur, and the women of Attic Tragedy their surpassing interest.

What has been said above about the barbarity of the legends on which Greek Drama is based, applies particularly to the story from which the figure of Clytemnestra was taken. It was a history of wrongdoing, of foul guilt going back for generations: or rather, the history of a sin which, to use the words of the poet himself, begot more sin in each succeeding generation. Æschylus wrote his greatest work around this theme, a trilogy of three dramas called the *Agamemnon*, the *Choephoræ*, and the *Eumenides*.

The first two of these dramas furnish the material for the story of Clytemnestra. The last deals with the remorse of Orestes, her son, and the atonement by which the long record of crime is finally closed and a new era of hope begins. Clytemnestra is, as it were, the last sacrifice demanded by the Furies which had pursued the house of Tantalus so long, and she represents in herself the two forces by which that vengeance had always been effected—a wrong done and a wrong suffered. For Æschylus makes us see that it is not only by the first sin of Tantalus that all his descendants have been relentlessly pursued; but that each in his turn has added something of his own—some crime of passion or of pride—to bring the penalty on himself.

It is from this standpoint that we must look at Clytemnestra and judge of her action. She was the instrument of a power beyond herself, the dread fate which had marked Agamemnon the King, her husband, as another victim of the hereditary curse. But she was not merely an instrument. She had fallen prey to her own unlawful passion, and when she struck the blow which fate ordained, it was not impelled by the single motive of revenge for the sacrifice of Iphigenia, but a confusion of passionate anger and conscious guilt.

The *Agamemnon* opens with the joyful announcement of the fall of Troy. The scene is laid in the wealthy city of Mycenæ, in the palace of Agamemnon the King, where a watch had been kept for many months for the return of the Greek fleet. Ten years before, when the fleet had

sailed for Troy to avenge the carrying-off of Helen, there had been left behind in the royal home a mother stricken by an awful grief. For the King Agamemnon, delayed at Aulis by adverse winds, and in brutal haste to be gone, had offered up to the gods a human sacrifice—the sacrifice of his own young daughter Iphigenia. The prayers of Clytemnestra the Queen, and the tears of the beautiful girl herself, could not prevail upon him. Iphigenia's life was forfeited to a hideous superstition, and the host sailed away, leaving Clytemnestra overwhelmed with sorrow and wrath. Here, then, are the two contributing elements to the tragedy—the wrong done and the wrong suffered. Agamemnon, driven on by the curse which lay over his house, blinded by his own pride and headstrong impatience to the true nature of the crime that he was committing, was forging the weapon of his own destruction. And here too we have the deed which accounts for and explains Clytemnestra—making of her not the mere savage murderess of tradition, without a touch of humanity, but an outraged mother, the avenger of her child.

It is necessary to emphasize this point a little because we have been used to regard Clytemnestra as a mere monster of cruelty. It is therefore a shock of surprise, when we come to Æschylus for her story, to find that he has made her quite human. He is not concerned in her case, any more than with the other persons of his Drama, to expose intricate motive, or to paint delicate shades of character. In his task of hewing out dramatic form—of virtually creating Drama—he left subtlety and ingenuity and stage-

craft to be perfected by his successors. Hence he is not exercised very much about making his plot a plausible one, or to explain how its incidents are effected. He has a great religious purpose; and this, with the ritual form in which he had to work, subordinates the purely dramatic elements. But he does clearly let us see—and this is all the more important from his usual reticence—that the whole course of Clytemnestra's action was determined by Agamemnon's inconceivable cruelty.

This point eludes us often, because we accept the sacrifice of Iphigenia as an act belonging to a barbarous age. So it is, but we forget that the age of Agamemnon had practically left barbarism behind it. The slaughter of Iphigenia must have been almost as revolting to the ideas of that time as it is to us; and although in times of national crisis fanatical minds may have been capable of reviving the savage custom of human sacrifice, that is no justification of Agamemnon. And that he submitted to the superstitious frenzy, and offered up the life of his child, was the act which armed Clytemnestra against him.

The deed was, however, of a piece with his character. He was haughty, passionate, headstrong, brooking no resistance and no rivalry: a man of tremendous force of character who had grown too great and who in his pride had even dared to dishonour Apollo himself in the person of his votaries. To such a man, who after ten years' preparation found his fleet hindered by unfavourable gales, the slaying of his daughter was merely an unpleasant step toward the fulfilment of his purpose. Her beauty and her

youth were of little account, and her mother's tears and entreaties were brushed aside as weakness.

The story of Clytemnestra, then, rightly begins here. She too was passionate and proud, with a will of iron: a nature of strangely blended strength and tenderness. When the blow came from the hand which should have shielded her, it struck dead her gentler self. She gave herself up to thoughts of revenge; and hearing from Troy as the years passed tidings of Agamemnon's infidelity, the last link between them was broken. Other news would come to her ears: of sedition amongst the people, left so long without a ruler; of the country suffering from the need of its strongest men, who were all away at the war; and of a certain Egisthus, her husband's enemy, who had returned from exile. There would be a bond of sympathy between Clytemnestra and this Egisthus. Had he not a feud against her husband? Was he not wronged by Agamemnon, too? Had his father not suffered at the hands of Agamemnon's father? There would be a meeting between them, followed by other meetings, while they made common cause against the King; and presently the two were united, not only in a plot for Agamemnon's overthrow, but in the bonds of guilty love.

When the news came of the fall of Troy and the return of the army, Clytemnestra had matured her plans for vengeance. For years she had nursed her wrath, and plotted with all the subtlety of her mental powers. And for years she had hoped for and dreaded the day which would bring back the King to Mycenæ. Her love for Egisthus

was common knowledge in the palace. Her sin would doubtless be proclaimed to Agamemnon immediately after his arrival, even if he did not already know of it; and she knew that the penalty of it would be death. So every instinct and impulse of her nature, and every consideration of self-defence too, demanded instant action. Vengeance for the murder of her daughter, her love for Egisthus, and the need of self-preservation all combined to nerve her for what she had to do. Agamemnon's arrival was imminent; she must be ready, and when the moment came she must not falter. But meanwhile, before the old senators who had gathered to welcome him (and who form the Chorus of the drama) she must play the part of a loving wife.

When the first part of the trilogy (the *Agamemnon*) opens, beacon-lights announce the fall of Troy. The news flies through the palace, and there is instant excitement. The old senators come thronging out; and as they sing, wonderingly and half-doubting, Clytemnestra the Queen suddenly enters. She stands for a moment to confirm this amazing news, and the old men turn to address her. But she makes no answer: it is as though she has not heard them—as though nothing but the words "The King is coming" clamour in her ears, and bring a rush of emotion that stifles speech. She goes out silently; but while the old men are singing of the doom of Troy, she reappears. Her entrance now is resolute and majestical: her purpose is taken, and in firm tones she declares to the Senators that the news they have heard is true. As

she speaks, the tide of emotion rises again and carries her on to utterance that is almost prophetic.

Clytemnestra's speech is significant. She knows the nature of the King, and she fears that his victory over Troy has been a brutal one, pushed even to the last extremity of insult to the country's gods. That impious pride is her uppermost thought; with it, she steels her heart; and when the herald arrives, she listens in ominous silence as his tale confirms her utmost fears. Agamemnon, the ruthless slayer of his daughter, the destroyer of Troy, who had no fear of the gods and no pity for man, would have no mercy upon her. She must kill or be killed; and she must act quickly.

Even while the herald spoke came the sound of the procession which was bringing the King up from the ships. First, his own chariot, surrounded by his guard and by the people who had gone out along the road to welcome him. Then, following close behind, a chariot containing the solitary figure of a woman, seated amid the spoils of war. She was Cassandra, a prize of battle, brought home by Agamemnon to be his slave-wife. But she was no ordinary slave. Daughter of Priam, King of Troy, and virgin priestess of Apollo, she had been torn from the altar of the god by her captor; and Clytemnestra, watching her wild eyes, knew that Agamemnon had filled up the measure of impiety to the gods and insult to herself.

Agamemnon uttered a laconic greeting to the people, while the Queen stood tense and still. By no word or sign did he acknowledge his wife: only, in perfunctory terms,

hailed his country and his country's gods, and thanked the people for their welcome.

Then Clytemnestra, holding tremendous passions in the leash, began her formal speech of welcome.

The hour has come for which she has waited so long: her desperate plan is formed: all that may have been needed to strengthen it has been heaped upon her in the pride and insolence of the King. But she must dissemble a little longer; she must force herself to speak lovingly, to appear faithful before the people, and to lull suspicion in Agamemnon's mind. In her husband's speech there had been a veiled menace: and now, after the first conventional phrases of affection, her words, too, take on a double meaning; and an undercurrent of bitter irony runs through them. On the surface the obvious meaning, to meet the exigency of the moment; just below it lay another sense, designed to leap to life and plead for her when the deed that she is contemplating shall be accomplished.

The time has indeed come to put aside fear, but for a reason that these senators cannot see yet, any more than they can conceive the real nature of the burden that she had borne so long. To say that Clytemnestra's speech is not really that of a faithful wife, that it is too loud in its protestations of joy, too insistent and eager in its avowal of fidelity, is beside the mark. For not only is Agamemnon in all probability aware of Clytemnestra's sin, but she realizes that he may be aware of it. Hence the deep irony of the situation; and hence too the fact that these

protestations, begun calmly and deliberately with the object of deceiving the crowd, gradually take on a different tone. The King's manner to her from the moment of arrival had been cold, even repellent. The conviction grows that he has been forewarned, and with that conviction, the sense of danger to herself is heightened. As her speech proceeds we seem to feel her quickening pulse and tingling nerve, we seem to share the rush of fear that sweeps away restraint and carries her along a torrent of language that is wild, vehement, and almost frenzied.

Then self-control returns. There is profound significance in her closing words, an invocation to Justice to lead Agamemnon to his doom. There is an inner motive, too, as well as awful irony, in the invitation to the King to walk on "priceless crimson." She must contrive that he will commit himself still further before the people, who are already stirred by faction and chilled by his *hauteur*. In the full light of what she is about to do, she sees that this is Agamemnon's last public act; and has determined that the man of blood shall walk to his death along a crimson path. The deed is almost sacrilege; but after some protest, Agamemnon yields to her entreaties.

He has a consciousness of what he is doing, and his mind misgives him; but he who could deny to the mother the life of her child, cannot refuse this indulgence to his pride. Clytemnestra, in exultation that she can hardly conceal, reassures him. In lines of exquisite poetic beauty, but weighted with a meaning that he does not see, she declares that this honour is his due; that it is a sacrifice for his

return. Then, as Agamemnon passes within the palace, she remains for one instant outside. The fire of exultation dies away. She forgets the people standing round, the need for dissimulation, the danger of discovery. One thought sweeps everything else away—the thought of the stupendous deed that she is about to attempt, its horror and its peril. She raises her hands and utters an awful prayer:

> "*Zeus—thou fulfillest all—fulfil my prayer!*
> *And take good heed of all thou doest herein!*" [1]

Then she follows Agamemnon into the palace. But there remains one person whom she has overlooked, Cassandra, priestess and prophetess of Apollo. As the Chorus takes up a lovely song full of foreboding, the Queen returns and calls to Cassandra to come within. But there has fallen upon Cassandra a prophetic vision of the crime. She is distraught with fear and horror, and can find no answer to the imperious queen. Clytemnestra, to whom every moment is of infinite importance, suddenly loses all her dignity in mere rage at the silent, helpless girl.

As Clytemnestra passes a second time within doors, the poor captive begins to wail a prophecy of what is about to be enacted there. She mourns for the awful curse upon the house.

She foresees the death of Agamemnon and her own fate beside him. Twice she approaches the palace and twice recoils in horror. But at last, committing herself to

Apollo, she rushes within; and instantly there rises a dreadful cry. It is the voice of the King.

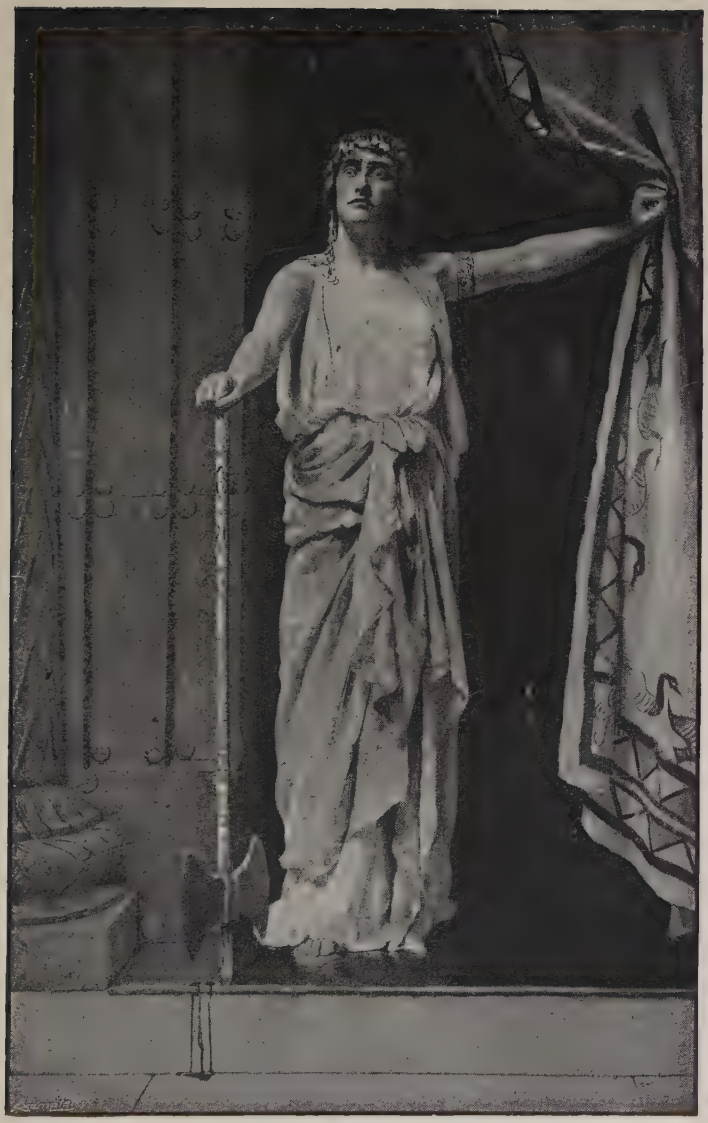
> *"Ah! Ah! I am mortally stricken, here, in the palace!"*

The old men stand paralysed with fear; and before they can move a step to help, the agonized voice cries a second time:

> *"Oh me! Again I am smitten, to the death!"*

There is an instant uproar and outcry. The palace becomes noisy with hurrying feet and clamorous voices; the old men feebly rush this way and that, unable to decide, in their weakness and senility, how to act. In the midst of the disorder, the doors of the palace are thrown open, and Clytemnestra is revealed, weapon in hand, bending over the body of Agamemnon. A dreadful hush falls; and the Queen, drawing herself up before the people, deliberately confesses to the deed and declares her motives.

> *"I, who spake much before to serve my need,*
> *Will here unspeak it, unappalled by shame.*
> *. . . Time, and thought still brooding*
> *On that old quarrel, brought me to this blow.*
> *'Tis done, and here I stand: here where I smote him!—*
> *I so contrived it,—that I'll ne'er deny,—*
> *As neither loophole nor defence was left him. . . .*
> *Such—O ye Argive elders who stand here,—*
> *Such is the fact. Whereat, an if ye will,*
> *Rejoice ye! . . .*



CLYTEMNESTRA 94

Hon. John Collier

By permission from the original picture in the Guildhall Art Gallery

Such a cup of death
He filled with household crime, and now, returning,
Has drained in retribution."

But to the Senators only one thing is clear. A terrible crime has been committed: their king has been foully slain. All Clytemnestra's pleas in extenuation of the deed are wasted words. To them the situation is tragically simple: her guilt is plain; there is but one word that fits her—murderess. There is no question for them of reason or of motive. What she claims to be a righteous judgment upon Agamemnon, they declare to be a crime demanding punishment. But they are not strong enough to enforce their will; and when they threaten Clytemnestra with banishment, she answers with scorn.

Then, as the elders mourn the death of the King and the demon of vengeance that haunts the house, Clytemnestra, in passionate conviction, declares that she has been merely an instrument of that spirit of vengeance.

She comforts herself with the thought that now at last the Furies are appeased. No doubt of her own motives assails her: no warning hint that crime is not cancelled by fresh crime. In the first glow of triumph she has no premonition of the return of an avenging son. She proposes to herself a reign of peace with Egisthus which shall erase all memory of the past.

"*Might but this be all of sorrow, we would bargain now*
for peace. . . .

I and thou together ruling with a firm and even hand,
Will control and keep in order both the palace and the land." [1]

On this note of false security the *Agamemnon* closes; and for the fate of Clytemnestra, which now becomes bound up with the story of Electra, we must go to the second drama of the trilogy, the *Libation-bearers*.

[1] From Professor Lewis Campbell's translation of the *Agamemnon* (Oxford University Press).

Æschylus: Electra

THE Æschylean Trilogy pauses at the point of Clytemnestra's triumph. The first drama, the *Agamemnon*, ends there. We left the Queen tasting the joy of revenge, but by no means gloating heartlessly over Agamemnon's fall. She was conscious of the magnitude of the event; and the awfulness of her deed would have daunted even her strong spirit had she not been confident that she was the instrument of destiny in striking down the proud and cruel King.

The friends of Agamemnon, the loyal faction which should have risen against her, must have been few and weak. They were evidently soon subdued. They could not stand against the force of her powerful will; and, moreover, she combined with her strength a wise tact and a keen sense of justice. Doubtless these qualities had gone far to establish her government in Agamemnon's long absence. Her sway was no new thing to the people of Argos; and when she resumed it with Egisthus as her consort, she took up the thread of her former life, with little outward sign to mark the change.

Underneath the surface of national life, wrath and horror at the murder of the King must have smouldered. Inside the palace itself, as we shall see presently, there was a small party ardently devoted to his memory and to the cause of his absent son, Orestes. But they were no match

for Clytemnestra; and she in her turn, having shaken off the nightmare of fear in which she had lived for so many years, proposed to herself a future that should cleanse and sweeten all the past. Her first emotion was one of intense relief, not only from the long strain of suspense, but from the fact that now, as she firmly believed, the old curse upon the house of Atreus had at last been fulfilled. Her hand had dealt the final blow; the last life demanded by that implacable spirit had now been offered up. Henceforward it only remained to wipe out the past by just rule and sober living.

So for a time—we do not know quite how long—she lulled herself in false security. Years may have passed in this ominous calm: memory fell asleep, and she lived serenely in a present that was full of such interest and action as her mind delighted in. In such a mood, she would not observe, or would disregard, small signs of disaffection around her. Day by day she would see the sad face of her daughter Electra; but until some shock came to awaken her sleeping soul, Electra's accusing eyes would fall upon her unheeded. The awakening came at last, however; and it is at this point that Æschylus opens the second part of his trilogy, in the drama called the *Choephoræ, or Libation-bearers.*

The scene is laid outside the Royal Palace at Mycenæ, before that tomb of Agamemnon which archæologists within recent years have brought to light on the ancient site of the city.

The time is morning, and two young men, who have

evidently travelled far, approach the tomb. One is Orestes, the son of Agamemnon whom Clytemnestra had sent away as a child. The other is his dear friend Pylades. Orestes has returned secretly to Argos, bidden by the oracle of Apollo to avenge his father's death. But he has no army: he does not know that he has a single friend in Mycenæ; and his purpose is fraught with extreme danger. How he will accomplish it he cannot yet imagine; but he must first try to discover if there are any in the palace who will befriend him.

As they reach the tomb, Orestes calls upon Hermes, the god who guides the shades of the dead, and invokes his father's spirit.

Then, according to a solemn custom of the heroic age, Orestes begins to clip the locks of hair from his head and place them upon the tomb as a votive offering. As he is thus engaged, a train of mourning women slowly emerge from the palace, carrying vessels in their hands with libations for the dead. They are slaves, captive Trojan women whom the poet uses as the Chorus of his Drama; and they are followed at a little distance by the drooping figure of a girl, whom Orestes rightly believes to be his sister Electra. They are coming to pour offerings at the tomb of the King. This in itself is a sign of encouragement to Orestes. But he dare not show himself until he is assured that they are friendly to his cause; and he and Pylades hastily withdraw, where they may hear and see the ceremony without being seen.

The women are singing; and as their lovely parodos

rises and falls, we learn why they are coming thus early to the neglected tomb of the murdered King. The astounding fact reveals itself that they are sent by Clytemnestra. Clearly, the awakening has come to her at last. In the night that has just passed she had been visited by a dream that seemed to her a dreadful portent. She had started from her bed, screaming with horror, and had called for lights. But the crowding women with their lamps could not drive away the vision of the fearful serpent-birth that had turned and rent her breast. And Clytemnestra, her conscience suddenly shaken into life, had sent for the interpreters. They had no comfort for her, however, in their reply, but confirmed her fear, that this dream was an omen sent from the unquiet spirit of her husband. Remorse assailed her. The shade of Agamemnon, neglected hitherto, must be propitiated. As soon as daylight came, libations should be poured upon the tomb; and that they should be acceptable, Electra should perform the rite. She might not herself call upon that dread spirit in the underworld; but Electra, with her grief-marred face and her loyal love to her father, would be a fitting suppliant.

Thus it happens that Electra, in the first light of early morning, stands at the tomb. Her heart is filled with bitter grief. She loathes the task that she is commanded to perform—the rite which, after years of callous neglect, is only now offered to the injured shade because some beginning of fear has come into her mother's mind. In all this time, none of the dues that are sacred to the dead

had been permitted for Agamemnon. No libations had been poured, no locks had been shorn from the head; and even the mourning of Electra and her women had had to be hidden away from sight and sound of the Queen. Now, suddenly, from no motive of love or reverence to the dead, from no sense of tenderness to her daughter, from no reason that Electra can perceive save a premonition of danger to herself, Clytemnestra orders that the proper ceremonies shall be observed.

Electra cannot see the real motive which sways the Queen. Partly from her very youth and innocence, partly because there is in her a tinge of the iron temper of her father, she is blind to everything but Clytemnestra's guilt. She sees her mother in the light of one fact only—the murder of the being whom she had loved most dearly. And looking back upon the past, all its events are viewed through that harsh light. There was the banishment of her brother Orestes; the coming of the strange man Egisthus whom, for some reason that she could not then comprehend, she had always loathed; the return and death of her father; her own subsequent misery and degradation. With the hardness of youth, she can conceive of nothing which could explain her mother's action, much less palliate it. Her sister Iphigenia she could not clearly remember; and if the story of her sacrifice was known to Electra, her absolute devotion to her father accepted it unquestioningly. In no case could she apprehend how that crime would wound her mother; just as she could not see or understand the darker side of Agamemnon's

character. Only one thing was painfully realized—that the great king who was her father, and who had known how to be tender to the little girl he left at home in Mycenæ, had been done to death by the woman she called her mother. And now this woman, whom the years had taught Electra to hate, commanded her to supplicate the wronged dead for peace. Electra cannot, and will not, entreat the dead in terms like these; and her first speech is awful with the bitterness in her heart. She turns to the slaves, grief and anger making her speech broken and barely coherent, as her thoughts are. But below the emotion, and almost unconsciously, there is a hint of some purpose forming. Once for all she puts aside her mother's orders; but she is not clear what will take their place. The dawning thought has not taken shape yet; and the vague counsels of the women do not at first help her. But presently they speak the name of Orestes, and bid her look for help to him. She is startled at the name, and the gleam of hope it brings lights up the underlying thought. She realizes suddenly what it means.

ELECTRA. *Well said and wisely! That most heartens me.*
CHORUS. *Then think of those who shed this blood, and pray—*
ELECTRA. *How? Teach me; I am ignorant. Speak on.*
CHORUS. *Some power, divine or human, may descend——*
ELECTRA. *To judge or execute? What wilt thou say?*
CHORUS. *Few words, but clear. To kill the murderer.*[1]

Here, then, is the thought of her own brain, clothed in words and echoed back to her from the women whom she

has implored to advise. But put thus into cold language, they have a dreadful sound from which she recoils in horror.

In this tense dramatic moment, we are shown what the theme of the Drama is to be. We are shown too, as vividly and almost as rapidly as in a lightning-flash, the clear outlines of Electra's character. The beautiful devotion to her father's memory: the blind hatred of Clytemnestra: the desire for revenge vaguely forming, and leaping full-grown at the first prompting from without; but—and here is the crux—that desire held in check by a profound religious sentiment. This reverence for the gods makes the whole tragedy, for Electra and Orestes both; it provides the dramatist with the inevitable inner conflict round which the action will revolve; and, most important of all, it has an ethical significance which will sanctify the revenge of Electra and Orestes. For while the mere human impulse with them both is to strike back rapidly and without mercy for the blow that has killed their father, a higher sense restrains them; and it needs an imperious mandate from Apollo to nerve them to the deed. This reluctance for the shedding of blood is a new thing in the age-long record of the house of Tantalus. When Electra asks whether the gods will not frown upon a prayer for vengeance, there is the birth of a holier spirit which will atone for and purify all those old crimes.

But first the final retribution must fall. Electra now lifts her voice in solemn prayer to the awful gods of the underworld and to the spirit of her father. She prays for

a wiser heart and purer hand than her mother's. With almost faltering words—literally constrained thereto, she says—she prays for vengeance; and she implores that Orestes may return and claim the throne now occupied by the hated Egisthus.

It is at this moment, just as the prayer closes in the Choral hymn, that Electra sees the locks of hair upon the tomb. She is amazed, almost alarmed. There is only one creature in all the world who should bring such an offering. If any other has placed it here, it is an act of sacrilege. She takes up the hair, examines it, and speaks about it rapidly and anxiously to the women. Gradually the conviction dawns that it can be no other than a votive lock shorn from the head of Orestes himself. Then he has been here? But where is he now? The thought that he has indeed returned, that he may even be near at hand at this moment, drives wild hope and fear alternately through her mind. Holding the lock within her hand, she says:

> "*Ah! could it but speak, and tell me*
> *Kind news, I were not shaken thus and cloven,*
> *Thinking two ways: but either with clear scorn*
> *I would renounce it, as an enemy's hair;*
> *Or being my brother's, it should mourn with me,*
> *And pay sweet honours at our father's tomb.*" [1]

Meantime, Orestes in his hiding-place had verified the fact that Electra was his sister. He had reassured himself, too, on another vital point. What he had heard and seen had convinced him that this group of women at

least was friendly to his cause. And at its head, holding out against great odds, and suffering extreme ills in consequence, was this brave spirit of Electra who, with all her tender and loyal devotion, was strong enough to dare the uttermost with him. He need no longer delay to reveal himself. He had heard Electra's prayer for his return, and for vengeance on her father's murderers; and, stepping forward, he came like an instant answer to her petition.

But Electra cannot recognize in this tall young man the boy who left their home so many years before. She is startled and incredulous; and there follows a curious little scene which, if it occurred in a modern play, would simply cause derision. Orestes gives such quaint evidence of his identity—the colour of his hair, which matches her own; the length of their footprints, which is similar; the embroidery on the robe that he is wearing, which he says was wrought by her own hands before he went to Athens. The poet is not very much concerned with probabilities. He has a great religious purpose which dominates all other considerations; and in the sublime onward sweep of the tragedy we are not troubled by minor inconsistencies. At this point they are simply lost sight of, in the keen dramatic interest of the scene when Electra is at last convinced that this is indeed her brother. What is proof to her is more than ample proof to us.

Then Orestes plainly declares the reason for his return, and taking up Electra's prayer to Zeus, he cries for help

in the vengeance to be accomplished for his father. He claims that he has a direct mandate from Apollo which was clear, definite, and imperative; and the oracular utterance carried with it terrible penalties, should these two children of the murdered King dare to disobey. Yet we feel, all through Orestes' speech, that the conflict is warring within him too. He cannot accept the mandate implicitly. In the emphasis that he lays on his authority, in the precise repetition of the very words of the oracle, in the horror with which he enumerates the threatened punishments, we know that he is trying to fortify himself against fear and horror at the deed. Now that he comes close to his actual purpose, a strange new questioning spirit arises which he strives to appease—a shuddering reluctance which compels him to throw himself back upon the divine mandate. "Was not this a word to be obeyed?" he asks; and then, "Yea! Were it not, the deed must yet be done."

But struggle as Orestes may, the doubt will not be quelled. The crime of mother-murder which they contemplate starts up before them in all its hideous barbarity; and the burden imposed on Orestes is more than he can bear. As we know, it will lead him ultimately to madness. All through the *kommos* which follows, a long and sublimely mournful hymn chanted alternately by Orestes, Electra and the Chorus, the brother and sister seem to be battling with this question of the righteousness of their action. They appeal to Zeus and to the powers of the nether world: they cry to the spirit of their father: they

ELECTRA 106

Gertrude Demain Hammond, R.I.

remind each other of the cruelty and shamelessness of Clytemnestra: they recall the greatness of Agamemnon, and contrast it with his ignominious end: they dwell upon the wrongs done to Electra, and the sin of Egisthus, and the curse upon their house. The wave of emotion rises and falls. At one moment a solemn confidence reassures them that the vengeance is righteous; at another, the doubt sweeps back and shatters their assurance, and again they are driven to bewail their wrongs and invoke the name of Justice.

The resolution is taken at last. It remains now only to ask their father's blessing, before putting it into effect. Orestes begs for power to rule well in Agamemnon's stead, and promises rich sacrifices to his shade.

The real crisis of the tragedy is here, although the action has all to follow. Doubts and fears are now subdued: Orestes and Electra have risen to a height of stern conviction which will carry them to the fulfilment of their purpose, although neither it nor the sanction of Apollo will save them from remorse. The action moves rapidly now, as though the revenge must be accomplished at once, in the heat of this terrible purpose. Orestes is told of Clytemnestra's dream—that she had borne a serpent which had turned and rent her breast. He welcomes it gladly, as an auspicious omen for him; and forms a hasty plan of action. He and Pylades will apply for entrance at the palace gates, with a feigned story of Orestes' death. Electra must make ready for them within, and secure their admittance. They will kill Egisthus first, and

afterward complete the revenge by the murder of Clytemnestra.

It is not a very skilful plot, but it succeeds. Clytemnestra receives Orestes and his friend, believing them to be strangers from Phokis. She is grieved and shocked at their story of Orestes' death; and goes out to apprise Egisthus of it. Presently Egisthus passes across the stage alone, on his way to give an audience to the guests and, though he does not know it, to pay the penalty for his crime. He goes into the palace, and an instant afterward he is heard to utter a dreadful cry. Attendants rush forth, calling upon the name of the Queen.

Then there follows an awful scene between Orestes and Clytemnestra, as she grieves over the body of Egisthus.

For an instant Orestes wavers; and he half turns to Pylades with an appeal for counsel. But the answer is a stern reminder of the oracular command; and the pitying moment passes.

So Clytemnestra falls at the hands of Orestes; but the vengeance has no joy for him. Before his mother's mighty spirit has taken its way along the road to Hades, a torture of remorse has fallen upon her son. Even while he stands above the murdered body, her avenging Furies come thronging about him "with Gorgon faces and thick serpent hair" and he feels his reason totter.

He cries in anguish to Apollo to justify him; but there comes no answer from the god; and faster and faster crowd those grizzly spectre forms, rushing upon him in hideous multitudes, and menacing him with ghastly tor-

ments. And as the tragedy closes we see Orestes fleeing before the rout of the Furies to find sanctuary at the shrine of Apollo.

We hear no more of Electra from Æschylus. Measured by action, or even by language, the part she plays in his trilogy is quite a small one. It is significant, too, that this her first appearance in Attic Tragedy is not called by her name, but the *Libation-bearers*. Such a title, while it serves to remind us of a stage of Greek Drama when the Chorus was the whole play, indicates also the poet's conception of the theme. To Æschylus, the religious act at Agamemnon's tomb, with all that it implies, was of much greater import than the figure of the great king's daughter. The force of destiny, the amazing mandate of the god and its conflict with filial love and duty, and the pursuit of the matricide by the Furies, constitute for him the essence of the tragedy.

But when we find that Sophocles and Euripides, who wrote about Electra afterward, have boldly made her the protagonist, and have called their plays by her name, we are prepared for a change of attitude. The story is now viewed from a more human standpoint. The protagonist is no longer a chorus, but a woman: the ruling passion is now not so much a principle, a moral, a duty, or any idea in the abstract; but strong human will, intense human love, and mortal hatred. The motive of the Drama is no longer a religious ceremonial, but the enactment of a tragic story. And the final result is not now that of a grand moral lesson conveyed through

the lips of shadowy demi-gods, but a really dramatic drama.

It follows, therefore, that with this change the character of Electra has taken on a stronger and more complete individuality. In the version of Sophocles, she rises to her greatest height. She is a creature who can endure to the end and dare the uttermost: of absorbing love and strenuous hatred: tender and strong. Unbending and uncompromising, she is in conflict not only with the mother whom she loathes, but with the weakness of a sister whom she loves. Implacable to her enemies, she is capable of absolute devotion to the memory of her father and to the absent Orestes; and in these contrasted qualities Sophocles has made of his Electra a tremendously dramatic figure. For the finest drama, and for the most enthralling story we must go to him. But his purpose seems to have been merely artistic. He takes a hint from the old legend, and developing its possibilities to the utmost he evolves a play which is perhaps more powerful as drama and certainly more perfect as art than that of Æschylus or Euripides. But it has hardly any other significance. His conception of Electra, while finely complete and harmonious, is of a being untroubled by ethical considerations, and casting no fearful glance "before and after."

With Euripides, on the other hand, the character of the protagonist becomes more deeply significant than even Æschylus had made her. For Euripides, the mandate of the god was false, and the vengeance taken was a stu-

pendous crime against humanity. When Orestes and Electra, wrought up by passion, have accomplished it, Euripides makes reaction come to them as to any other mortal being. They are not pursued by visible Furies, from which they may flee to the sanctuary of Apollo, but by remorse and cankering doubt of their own motives. For him they are simply human creatures; and the touch of realism, animated as it is by a daring sceptical spirit, has laid a blight on much that was beautiful in the earlier conception of Electra's character. To recover that, we must go back to the *Libation-bearers* of Æschylus.

[1] From Professor Lewis Campbell's translation of the *Choephoræ* (Oxford University Press).

Æschylus: Cassandra

FOR the beginning of Cassandra's story we must go back to the epic theme. The first word which Homer tells of her is in the Thirteenth Book of the *Iliad*, where she is called "the fairest of Priam's daughters." But that is late in the Siege; and there is a legend which gives her an earlier connexion with the tale of Troy. Indeed, we find that she was a link in the chain of events which led Helen and the Greek army to her native city.

When she was still a young girl she had, in some mysterious way, been beloved by the god Apollo. The god gave her the gift of prophecy; but because she refused his love he angrily confounded the gift that he could not recall by decreeing that her prophetic utterances should never be believed.

The events of her career show blacker and more hideous against the clear light of her spirit. All through the long agony of the Trojan war we have a sense of Cassandra at the altar, lifting pure hands in supplication for her dear city. The fighting raged outside the walls like an angry sea, while inside the town and away in the Greek encampment all the passions let loose by war raged no less fiercely than the battle itself. But Cassandra, withdrawn from sight and sound of the conflict, continued to pray and sacrifice. Her life was consecrated. And although the gods themselves seemed sometimes leagued against her;

although she had a perception of what the end must be, nothing could weaken her endurance nor shake her will. The Trojan princes wooed her in vain: the love of the great Sun-god himself could not make her swerve. The glory of her beauty: her gift of vision: her lofty impassioned soul, were vowed irrevocably to the service of her country and her home.

Yet this idealist and mystic was destined to suffer the worst brutalities of war in the hour of Troy's destruction. She was made captive at her own altar; and was carried away by Agamemnon to be his slave-wife and the rival of his queen. The mind revolts at the thought: it is too awful to contemplate, and will not shape itself in cold reflection. The poets seem to have felt this; and we find that Æschylus and Euripides, who have both dwelt upon the story of Cassandra's downfall, rise to stormy heights of emotion when they tell about it.

Euripides has placed Cassandra in the group of royal women in his *Troades*. The time of the drama is the morning which follows the overthrow of Troy; and the action represents the carrying-off of the Princesses by their captors. It is, one would think, a time and a scene quite unfitted for dramatic presentation. The immense excitement—of victory on the one hand and defeat upon the other—has ebbed away; and all that remains to the Trojan women is misery so profound and hopeless as almost to be beyond the power of expression. The measure of their pain seems to claim a reverent silence; and we feel that the *Troades* does need the sanction of the

ethical purpose which Professor Murray has found in it. But once we realize the deep and humane thought behind it: that the poet has chosen this part of the story expressly to reveal the hideous suffering which war entails upon women, the tragedy is fraught with significance.

The final act of Cassandra's life is given by Æschylus in the *Agamemnon*. He, no less than Euripides, feels the appalling tragedy of her story; and both poets have put into her lips lyrics of wild and haunting beauty. But Æschylus, by removing the action to Mycenæ and by bringing Cassandra into conflict with Clytemnestra, has wrought a climax of extraordinary power.

If there be any truth in the legend, it was Cassandra who first recognized the shepherd Paris for the son of Priam. The stripling who descended from the glens of Mount Ida to compete in the games outside the city was unknown and unloved by the Trojans whom he defeated. They were jealous of the handsome stranger who carried off the prizes from them; and he soon found himself embroiled with Priam's athletic sons. He was hard beset. The odds were heavy against him; and like a hunted animal he flung himself before the altar of Apollo for protection.

Cassandra, the priestess of Apollo, had never before seen this young suppliant who was clinging to the altar; but as she looked on him now there came upon her a revelation of his identity. She knew of the old ring which had been placed about her baby brother's neck when he was

exposed to death upon the mountain; and, taking Paris by the hand, she touched the chain he wore and slowly drew to light the talisman.

> *This sign Cassandra showed to Priam straight.*
> *The king waxed pale and asked what this might be?*
> *And she made answer, "Sir, and King, thy fate*
> *That comes on all men born hath come on thee;*
> *This shepherd is thine own child verily."* [1]

Here, then, is the real beginning of the story of Cassandra. For the old King would not be warned against his fate. He welcomed his boy as one returned from death. A great festival was made in his honour; and of all the many sons of Priam there was not one so dearly loved. Joy and merriment filled the city. All the warning oracles which had spoken at the birth of Paris were forgotten. Nothing but thanksgiving was heard for the restoration of the fair young Prince; and amid it all, Cassandra knew that when she placed his hand in the hand of Priam, Destiny had wrought for the fall of Troy.

The years passed speedily at first, untouched by care; and then more slowly, big with events. First the sailing of Paris. Then, after Helen came back with him to Troy, an interval when the Trojans waited, wondering how the Greeks would repay the insult. Finally, the arrival of the Greek fleet and the beginning of the Siege.

Priam was not unsupported in his long ordeal. Neighbouring princes joined him against the hostile Greeks, some in the hope of reward and some for the sake of

friendship. There was one warrior, Othryoneus, who came because he loved Cassandra. He brought no "gifts of wooing," but made a promise to the King "of a mighty deed, namely, that he would drive perforce out of Troyland the sons of the Achaians." Priam consented to his suit; but we are not told what Cassandra thought of it. Probably she was not consulted. It is conceivable, so tender was her love of home and country, that to reward the hero who would save them, she would even consent to lay aside her holy office; to recall her soaring spirit to dwell beside the hearth. But the eye which saw so far knew that it need not consider the present problem. Before the end, Cassandra saw the valiant man who loved her lying pierced by the spear of Idomeneus.

That was toward the end of the war; and in the penultimate scene of it, the bringing-in of Hector's body, Cassandra appears again. She had watched all that fearful night, when the old King went out to the Greek camp to beg of Achilles for the body of his great son. And in the cold light of dawn, straining her eyes from Pergamos and weary with her vigil, she was the first to see the mournful procession. "Then beheld she him that lay upon the bier behind the mules, and thereat she wailed and cried aloud throughout all the town." The people wakened at her terrible cry, and coming out of their houses, they followed her down to the gate to meet the unhappy King.

Hector's death was the beginning of the end. Troy fell. Its brave men were slaughtered, its palaces burnt,

its altars dishonoured; and, worst of all, its women and children were carried off as slaves. Of this the *Iliad* does not speak; but it was an event which seized and held fast the imagination of the Attic dramatists. The glory of war, which throws a glamour over the fighting in the epic, gives place in the later poets to the pain and horror of it.

The *Troades*, to which we come next for the story of Cassandra, breathes throughout the pitiful spirit of the poet Euripides. It relates what befell the women of the royal household after the sack of the city. As grey daylight comes we see the figure of the aged Queen, prostrate before the charred walls of the town. She rises feebly, moaning in a bewilderment of grief and physical weakness. To her approach, one after another, furtively, the frightened Trojan women who form the Chorus of the play. Her crying has wakened them, and they steal out to try to discover what fate is in store for them. Even while they ask a messenger, Talthybius, arrives from the Greek ships. In curt phrases he replies to the Queen's anguished inquiries about her daughters. They have been assigned to certain of the Greek chiefs, he says: Andromache to Neoptolemus, she herself to Odysseus, and Polyxena (he speaks ambiguously, to hide a grimmer fact) to serve at the tomb of Achilles. "And what of Cassandra?" asks the stricken Queen. "She has been chosen from all for Agamemnon's prize," is the reply.

Hecuba is appalled at this fate that is decreed for her child. She whose pure spirit had always ranged beyond

the things of time and sense, who was the consecrated priestess of Apollo and set apart for holy service, is condemned to be the slave-wife of the man who has destroyed their city. The poor mother wails in horror at the thought: it is too awful, too sacrilegious a deed even for these proud Greeks, and she cries out in protest. The herald silences her with a brutal comment on the good fortune which makes her daughter the bride of a king; and then orders an attendant to fetch Cassandra from the tents. But there is no need for the man to go. Even while they are speaking there comes a sudden flash of strange fire, and the wild figure of Cassandra appears, robed in white, garlanded with flowers and carrying a blazing torch. The fearful events of the past night have driven her to a frenzy. Arrayed as for a happy bridal, she comes singing a hymn to Hymen; but the terror in her eyes and the poignancy of the words she utters hold her hearers dumb.

Her frenzy gives place now to a more meditative strain. She tries to find words to comfort Hecuba; and as the calmer mood deepens she rises to a perception of the dignity of high failure contrasted with low success. The Trojans dying for their homes she sees as a nobler thing than the triumph of the Greeks.

At this point the herald is suddenly roused to reply. He turns upon her furiously for her ominous forebodings and bids her be silent. If he did not know her for a mad woman, he says, she should suffer for boding thus evil to the Greeks. He orders her roughly to follow him; but at

his speech the frenzy rushes over Cassandra again. She turns upon Talthybius in magnificent anger and scorn. "How fierce a slave," she cries; and then the prophetic gift burns in her as she foretells in language of awful beauty her own doom and that of Agamemnon.

Cassandra is led away to the Greek ships, no blessing to the toiling mariners. For even their own gods are wroth at the crime against her; and many a heart-breaking struggle is in store for them: many a noble ship will be lost, and many a hero's life will pay the penalty, before their homes are reached. Perhaps to Agamemnon more than most, the Deities of the Elements were kind. But then they knew the fate awaiting him, and in ironic pleasure sped him to it. There is no need to recall the details of his arrival at Mycenæ, or of his welcome by Clytemnestra, almost distraught by conflicting hope and fear. Agamemnon was weary of his voyage; weary, too, of the long steep chariot-drive up from the sea. Yielding to his wife's entreaty to walk on costly crimson to the palace, he turns for an instant to Cassandra's chariot.

> "*Receive, I pray thee*
> *This stranger-woman kindly. Heaven still smiles,*
> *When power is used with gentleness. No mortal*
> *Is willingly a captive, but this maid,*
> *Of countless spoils the flower and crown, was given*
> *To me by the army, and attends me home.*" [2]

The moment is crowded with emotion. For the briefest space—merely long enough, in fact, to make the

Trojan woman formally known to Clytemnestra—these three strong spirits face each other. Cassandra, wide-eyed and rigid, looks beyond the King and Queen, beyond the crowding people, at *something* that her vision warns her is beyond the palace doors. To Clytemnestra, her presence is an insult, and her purity an intolerable reproach. There is one glance of bitterness and hatred from the Queen which Cassandra does not see; and then the insolent King enters the palace, Clytemnestra following him. She returns immediately, however, lashed to a fury in which her dignity goes to shreds, and addresses Cassandra in biting and cruel words.

The poor captive does not answer. She listens in silence, too, when the Chorus address her; and when Clytemnestra, with that crucial moment imminent, grows wild with impatience. "Sure she is mad," ejaculates the angry Queen; "I'll not demean myself by throwing more words away." Only when she has gone does Cassandra break silence; and then by a wail which the sympathetic Elders cannot understand.

The old men pity her, and try to calm her frenzy. She looks round on them, as if awakening from a dream, and asks what house is this. They reply that it is the Atridæ's palace, and the word calls up to Cassandra the long black record of the house of Atreus.

In a long recital, Cassandra recounts the ancient crimes of the Atridæ; and in dark oracular language moans that there is worse behind. The old men are perplexed. They cannot follow her meaning, though over and over

again she struggles to make clear the doom that is even now about to fall.

The Elders begin to understand; but still the drift of her message is only partly clear to them. They realize that she is distraught, fearing some dreadful fate for herself; they have, too, a glimmering fear of danger to the King. But they cannot comprehend what it may be; and the thought of succour never dawns upon their dull old wits. They speak gently to Cassandra; but again her message seems to tear her with its force and urgency.

Then, point by point, she goes with studied clarity over all the "trail of long-past crime." So long as this is her theme, the Elders understand and confirm her words. But when, rising again on the wings of prophecy and therefore to a rapt and obscure utterance, she foretells the fall of Agamemnon and her own death, they are again at sea. She pauses for an instant, baffled; she knows that her end is imminent, and in her despair she casts stinging words at them for their stupidity and inaction. Never has Apollo's ban wrought so bitterly; and in the extremity of her anguish she declares that she will call upon the god no longer. She strips herself of the sacred emblems and flings them from her.

She takes a few steps toward the palace; but her courage fails for a moment. The reek of blood in her nostrils stifles her, and she recoils. In her last words passion and strength alike fade out, giving place to a pathetic human appeal:

"O strangers! friends!
I shrink not idly, like some timorous bird
Before a bush! Bear record in that day
When I am dead. . . ." [2]

And the old men, as she passes slowly out of sight, wail over her what is perhaps her most fitting epitaph:

Ah! what is mortal life? When prosperous,
A shadow can o'erturn it; and, when fallen,
A throw o' the wet sponge blurs the picture out.
THIS IS MORE PITEOUS THAN THE RUIN OF PRIDE.[2]

[1] From Andrew Lang's *Helen of Troy* (George Bell and Sons, Ltd.).
[2] From Professor Lewis Campbell's translation of the *Agamemnon* (Oxford University Press).

Æschylus: Io

WE turn now from the Trojan legend to that of Thebes. We are still in the realm of Tragedy; and in some respects the Theban story is more barbarous than that of Troy. But by some means the tension is slightly relieved, and the atmosphere is lightened by one degree. Perhaps that is because, in the dramas which treat of this subject, the poets seem to have gone back farther into the remote past and to have steeped themselves in the spirit of those early times. Perhaps, too, it is on account of something wilder and more primitive inherent in the Theban story itself. Such elements, and such a treatment by the poets, would tend to remove the persons of the drama a step further from probability, and would make them to that extent greater or less than human. Thus their appeal to the emotions would not be so direct, nor so intimate. On the other hand, the figures so presented gain in sublimity. Their mythical origin surrounds them with a halo, through which they loom vast, mysterious, and inaccessible.

Such a being is Io. In the *Prometheus Bound*, the drama in which her story is given, Æschylus has gone back for his subject literally to the beginning of things; to the time when Zeus was young and the reign of Chaos was not long overpast. We must be prepared, then, for a tale which in its details is marvellous and incredible: for a naïve account

of the love of the supreme god for a mortal woman: of the anger of Hera, his jealous queen: of the metamorphosis and long wanderings of the innocent maid: and of her reward at last, when she becomes the ancestress of the founder of Thebes, and ancestress too, in a remote generation, of Heracles, the deliverer of Prometheus.

Just when Io is supposed to have lived we do not know. She is said to have been the daughter of Inachus; and she was a priestess of Hera in Argos. But Æschylus has made her coeval with the Titans. In this poem, therefore, she is a denizen of that early world which saw the overthrow of Cronos from the throne of heaven, and the rise of his son Zeus. All the Titans save one had opposed the new god when he rose in rebellion against the primeval powers. But Prometheus, far-seeing from the first, and knowing that Zeus must conquer, lent him aid. It was a long and bitter struggle in the youth of the world. But at last Cronos and the Titans who had opposed him were hurled by Zeus into Tartarus—"under the misty darkness . . . in a dank place, at the verge of the earth." Typhon was buried under Etna; and Atlas, far in the West, was bowed beneath the pillar of the heavens, "where night and day meet and greet one another, as they pass the great threshold of bronze."

All now seemed calm and fair for the establishment of the new Hierarchy. Too calm and fair; for Zeus, with all his enemies subdued and possessing absolute power, soon grew tyrannical. With leisure now from Olympian warfare, he looked down upon the earth and the feeble

race of men. It seemed to him a contemptible thing, struggling weakly against pitiless forces and groping its way, by minute degrees that were imperceptible from his lofty height, toward a larger and a better state. It was a mean and futile and impotent race, he pondered. Surely it would be better to wipe it out of existence altogether, than let it continue to blot the face of the fair world.

So concluded the youthful ruler of Olympus, in his haughty strength. But Prometheus knew mankind better than Zeus. The hills and valleys of earth were his kin, dear and familiar to him; and he had come to love the imperfect human soul that had just managed to get itself born in those rude cave-men. He saw the violent act that the Lord of Olympus was planning in his mind; and resolved to save humanity. So, as the old poet Hesiod says in his *Works and Days*, "he stole fire for men from Zeus the Counsellor in a hollow fennel stalk, what time the Hurler of the Thunder knew not." But the boon to man meant sheer disaster to himself, as he knew when he filched it from Olympus. The purpose of Zeus could not be thwarted with impunity. Prometheus was condemned to age-long punishment, chained to a rock on an icy mountain-top until such time as a deliverer should come, and an immortal being could be found willing to give up life for him.

The punishment of Prometheus is the subject of the present drama. It is believed to have been the middle play of a trilogy, of which the last was the *Prometheus*

Unbound, and the first probably related the bringing of fire to earth. The *Prometheus Bound* is not dramatic in the sense that the *Agamemnon* and the *Choephoræ* are. There is hardly any action in it, for the suffering Titan continues chained to his rock throughout the poem. From the nature of the theme, too, the characters are too colossal and remote to make an intimate appeal to us. Yet the drama is charged with the deepest emotion, transcending the pity or fear of common experience. If it does not start into life before our eyes as an actual conflict, that is because it is rooted in a deeper and more crucial struggle between cosmic forces. And if the persons of the drama are unapproachable and unfamiliar, it is from the very reason of their sublimity.

We see the protagonist first as he is being riveted to the rocky wall by the god Hephæstus. The Fire-god reluctantly performs the task, bidden to it roughly by Force, who is invested for the moment with the strength of Zeus, but without his dignity. Hephæstus is indignant at the sentence on his kinsman, the Titan, and declares that he has no heart to chain him in this stormy mountain region, merely because of his beneficent help to man. But Force is inexorable: he urges on the work until every limb of the Titan is secured, and an adamantine wedge is driven through his breast. When all is accomplished, Prometheus is left alone; and then for the first time he breaks silence. He invokes the elements that are his kindred: the sky, the winds, the rivers, the smiling sea, the sun, the great earth-mother.

While Prometheus is speaking there gather softly round him the gentle sea-nymphs who are to be the chorus of the drama. They question him tenderly, in words that fall like balm, and elicit all his story. It is pitiable, they say, and they marvel at the penalty which Zeus imposes on so kind a creature.

Presently Oceanus himself, god of the dreadful river that circles the world, approaches in his chariot. He is old and grave and prudent. The action of Prometheus seems to him rash and daring: his opposition to Zeus mere pride. He advises the Titan to yield, since it is expedient to bow to the superior power. But Prometheus fiercely rejects such timid counsel. Nothing shall shake his resistance to the tyrant, and Oceanus may spare his breath. Let him go save himself: as for Prometheus, he will endure until it shall please Zeus to relent.

Hot words pass. Oceanus tries in vain to teach prudence to the high heart of the Titan, and departs angrily. Then the sea-nymphs sing a sweet song of pity; and Prometheus, touched to a softer mood, begs them not to think him hard and proud. Only, the thought of his wrongs is intolerable, received at the hand of one whom he himself had helped to place upon the throne of Olympus. And what had been his crime? None. His hands are clean : his integrity absolute. His sufferings are an amazing injustice: the price of beneficent deeds to humanity that he tells over to the wondering maids.

But the sea-nymphs, though they sympathize with his sorrow, cannot rise to the height of his thought. To them mankind is a "fleeting, dream-like race," unworthy of the sacrifice that he has made. They chide him gently. Why has he dared the wrath of Zeus, and why will he bear the weary ages of torture for such a people? The beauty of the lyric casts a spell upon us. The thought of the long-drawn agony, endured from century to century, makes us waver. Might he not have been misguided? Was Zeus right, perhaps? And would not the Titan be wise to make peace with so powerful a ruler?

Thus the softer mood of the sea-maidens wins upon us. Viewed through it, the resistance of Prometheus begins to look like stubborn self-will; and the decree of Zeus a righteous chastisement. But just as the feeling is gathering strength an episode occurs which reverses the current of emotion. For there rushes suddenly on the desolate scene a strange wild creature, half-woman and half-beast. Under the curling heifer's horns there is a fair white brow; and below the brow sweet human eyes, distraught with fear and pain. This is Io, the maid beloved by Zeus. Cast out of her home by the god's command, she has been chased from the society of her kind, and her fair woman form has been partly changed to bestial shape. For many a weary league she has been goaded onward by the gadfly of Hera; and even now she is haunted by the wraith of Argus, the huntsman of the hundred eyes whom the angry goddess had set to watch her. Good and beautiful she had been, her serene life gladly given to the service of

Hera in an Argive temple. Yet now she is doomed to wander restlessly over sea and land, through sun and storm, and by many an unknown lonely path, without apparent aim and for no apparent cause. As her feet stumble up the mountain-side and she stands before Prometheus, innocent and mercilessly persecuted, we feel that the moment is crowded with all the elements of tragedy. If we had wavered before, standing on that ridge of neutral ground where the cool airs of reason calm the passions; if the poet meant that we should waver for a moment, giving us in his unifying purpose some perception of the higher power as it would ultimately justify itself; he plunges us now into the arena again, with every emotion clamant to defend these victims of tyranny.

As they confront each other, Io speaks, forgetting her own griefs for the moment in contemplation of the suffering Titan.

Prometheus does indeed hear and know her, he says, the poor frenzied daughter of Inachus, whom Zeus loves. As he speaks her father's name, Io catches at it eagerly. Perhaps this may be a friend.

In rapid interchange of question and answer, the cause of the quarrel, and its consequence, are related to Io; and then, because she knows that Prometheus can foresee the future, she begs him to tell her what is in store for herself. The Titan warns her that the knowledge can only bring fresh pain, and the prophecy that Prometheus will make to her is more wonderful than she could ever dream. In

careful detail, and so impressively that she must remember every word, he indicates the first part of her wanderings. She must turn her face eastward, and faring through Scythia, pass along the sea-coast, avoiding the fierce Chalybes. Then on wearily to the range of the Caucasus, which she must ascend to the very summit; and following afterward a southward road, she will come to the land of the Amazons and down to the sea which separates the continents. Here she must boldly ford the strait, which in later times will be called Bosphorus because she, the cow-maiden, crossed it; and leaving Europe behind, she will tread on Asian soil.

But Prometheus, looking farther still into the future, sees some hope for her, as he contrasts her fate with his. However great her affliction, it must end some day; he can even foretell just what the issue will be, and when. But for him, suffering must continue until Zeus is hurled from his throne.

She begs for a revelation of the fate of Zeus; and the Titan tells briefly of a certain marriage that the god is contemplating, which must bring him ruin if Prometheus will not interpose.

Prometheus, resuming the course of her wanderings in Asia, gradually leads up to the climax of her story. Having crossed the strait, she is again to bend her steps eastward. Through the land of the Gorgons she must go, and of the Griffins, and of Phorcy's daughters, the three hags with one eye and one tooth between them. On the golden shores of Pluto she will see an army of one-

eyed horsemen, whom she must carefully avoid; and toiling onward still, she must follow the course of the river Ethiopia far up to its very source. Then, at Canopus, a town upon the shores of distant Nile, she will find rest.

So is completed the tale of Io's wanderings. And now, before Prometheus reveals the strangest thing of all, he would convince her that he is speaking truth indeed. So he recalls to her mind a marvel that had happened on her way thither, but which she had not spoken when she related her story.

> PROMETHEUS. *To the Molossian plains when*
> *thou hadst come, . . .*
> *And to Dodona's rock-ridge, to the seat*
> *And sacred oracle of Thesprotian Zeus,*
> *Famed for its marvel of the talking oaks,*
> *That with clear voice and nowise doubtfully*
> *Hailed thee (sounds this familiar to thine*
> *ears?)*
> *The glorious bride of Zeus in days to come.*[1]

The weird music of the oaks came back to her as the Titan spoke, phrased intelligibly now. It had haunted all her journey, but confusedly, hinting at something she could not clearly understand, and dared not name. But in the words of Prometheus its meaning pealed. Becoming in that far Eastern country the bride of the ruler of Olympus, she would found a splendid race. From her the Danaans would spring, one root of that Hellenic

people which should civilize the Western world. She would give a line of kings to the Argive throne. But greater and more blessed than all, from her should come the supreme Greek hero Heracles, destined to release this suffering Titan from his misery.

As she muses on the wonder of it, Prometheus takes up again the thread of his prophecy. In that rich land which borders on the Nile she may at last stay her weary feet.

From Io's son Epaphus should descend, generations afterward, a princess.

> *"'The royal line of Argos springs from her.*
> *Time fails to tell the story to its close:*
> *But of her strain one valiant shall be born,*
> *And famous with the bow; he from these ills*
> *Shall loose me.' Thus the titaness, my mother,*
> *Primeval Themis, prophesied to me,*
> *But of the ways and means too long it were*
> *To tell thee, and it profits not to know."* [1]

To immortal eyes, seeing the end in the beginning, it was a glorious destiny; one to compensate perhaps, if not to justify, all that she had endured. But Io is only a mortal maid. The vision of the future opens before her in one radiant moment, and then all is dark again, and nothing remains but her inexplicable pain. Even before Prometheus has finished speaking the cloud had fallen upon her mind again.

Tormented and distracted, she rushes from the scene

as wildly as she had come; but as the Titan and the sea-nymphs sadly watch her go, they see that her face is set now toward the East.

[1] From Mr Robert Whitelaw's translation of the *Prometheus* (Oxford University Press).

Sophocles: Jocasta

JOCASTA, in *Œdipus the King* of Sophocles, is a very real woman. Moreover, though she is a splendidly dramatic figure, she is not heroic in anything save her death. True, she is a queen, deriving royalty through several generations from Cadmus himself; and possessing the throne of Thebes so surely that when the King her husband died she had perforce to marry with his successor in order to establish him in the kingship. But despite her special royalty, which makes her, as Professor Murray has pointed out, like one of the consecrated queens of early times: despite the extreme deference which is paid to her, the weight that attaches to her counsel, and the sense of brooding fate that clings about her, she is before all an appealing and convincing human creature.

This vivid reality is a new fact in our study of Greek heroines, and the reason for it is that we have come now to the Drama of Sophocles. We have seen, so far, the women of Homer and those of Æschylus; and we have observed one or two characteristics which distinguish them.

The Homeric women are gracious and beautiful, glowing as it were with romantic charm. With one notable exception, Penelope, they appear rarely in the movement of the epic; and then only to form the central figure in a picturesque group. Reality has never touched them.

Generous as their emotions are, the extremes of passion have not for an instant distorted their loveliness. When they are called upon to act, they seem always to move with grace and gentleness; and even in their sorrow they are serene. If they share in the great stern things of life, its aspiration and its struggle, they give no sign of the penalty exacted. They are always young, fresh, and fair; except again Penelope, and she has only gained from age, not lost. A wise maturity has been added to her early charms. And thus these Homeric women, with their delicate infrangible bloom, seem to belong to a region just over the boundary-line of our common humanity.

The women of Æschylus are much greater figures. Clytemnestra is colossal: Cassandra, Electra, and Io are all conceived majestically. Unlike the Epic women, they are capable of strenuous action: strong passions sway them, and they are much concerned with the great issues of life. We know little or nothing about their appearance, and it does not seem to matter. They do not live in our mental vision pictorially, in soft, warm tints; but remotely grand, they appeal to a more austere sense of wonder, awe, and reverence. Surrounded by an atmosphere of myth, and sharing in the elevation of the poet's spirit, they seem to be creatures of an older and a bigger world.

In Sophocles the artist reigned paramount. All the advance which his drama made, in plot, incident, and character-building, was in the direction of a more perfect

art. And although there was some inevitable loss—as, for instance, the curtailment of the lyrics by modifying the part of the Chorus; and their lower poetic flight—on the whole the gain is very great. In the matter of characterization, with which we are chiefly concerned, the change is one which brings us out of the region of demi-gods into the world of men and women.

When we say that the persons of Sophocles's drama are real people, that is not to say that they are 'realistic' in the narrow sense of the word which conveys only what is average and actual. But it does mean that with all their splendour and dignity and fine achievement they are subject to our common humanity. They are not immune from the defects of their virtues. The passions which have led them to great deeds are potent agents of their downfall. It is the flaw within which helps to betray them.

For this reason, and also because the poet shows his characters moving in intimate human relationships, the women of Sophocles are intensely living creatures. Electra in her conflict with Chrysothomis, and Antigone with Ismene, are of the stuff of life; and the situations thus created are pure drama. Here two great natures clash. Closely bound by the ties of blood and affection, but at the opposite poles of temperament, the struggle between them is all the more bitter from the intimacy of their relationship. Both claim our esteem and both are sincerely confident in the purity of their intentions. But each mistrusts the other, believing her to be fatally mis-

guided or wilfully blind. It is by this faculty of seeing all sides of an issue, or, as Matthew Arnold expressed it, "to see life steadily and see it whole," that Sophocles has heightened and deepened the dramatic values of a story. Out of that, too, he has made Jocasta, with all her state and despite the unnatural horror with which she is touched, a pitiable figure.

Here again two noble natures, near and very dear to each other, are brought into conflict. In this case, however, there is an added element of tragic irony which increases the dramatic power threefold. For we know, as we watch the tender comradeship of Œdipus and Jocasta, that there is this sinister thing in the background, ready to flame out at any instant and make them loathsome in each other's eyes. And the moment when the shameful truth is revealed, literally dragged to light by Œdipus to his own undoing, is perhaps the most awful in Greek tragedy.

The story belongs to the Theban cycle, of which we have already heard. It is older than Homer, who calls Jocasta *Epicasta;* and it had many variants.

The essence of the tragedy lies in the double fact of Apollo's hostility to Œdipus and Jocasta and their ignorance of it. When Laius and Jocasta were young upon the throne of Thebes they prayed to Apollo to give them a son. The oracle at Delphi replied to Laius, "I will give thee a son, but it is doomed that thou leave the sunlight by the hands of thy child." Thus the decree was launched.

Laius and Jocasta trembled at the doom, and considered how it might be averted. When their son was born, they took a cruel and desperate means to save its father's life. Three days after his birth they handed over the babe to a herdsman, to be exposed on Mount Kithairon. And first they pierced his heels, to ensure his death. So Jocasta, out of love for her husband and fear of the oracle, brought herself to a deed which poisoned all her life. Yet it was of no avail against fate. For the man who took her babe had pity on it; and meeting a friendly herdsman who was in the service of Polybus, King of Corinth, he gave the child to him. Polybus and his queen Merope were childless; and the herdsman believed that they would welcome the little foundling. He was not mistaken: calling him Œdipus from his swelled feet, they brought him up as their son.

All went well until the boy had grown into manhood. Then one day a young companion, heated with wine, flung out a taunt about his birth. Œdipus, fully believing himself to be the son of Polybus and Merope, went to them with the story. They chastised the offender, but their replies to Œdipus's questions left a doubt of his parentage rankling in his mind. He determined to satisfy himself once for all by an appeal to Apollo; and he travelled to Delphi to inquire of the oracle in person. The reply was terrible, and, unlike most oracular utterances, seemed only too clear. He was doomed, it said, to slay his father and marry with his mother. But the most vital point, the names of his parents, was not revealed; and Œdipus, still

believing them to be Polybus and Merope, vowed never again to set foot in Corinth while they were living. So he hoped to avoid his doom; and he set out alone, along the road to Bœotia, and Thebes.

Now it happened that just about that time Thebes was afflicted by a strange monster. It was the Sphinx, sent by Hera to prey upon the city. Sitting upon a neighbouring hill, she claimed the life of every man who could not read her riddle—"What is the creature which is two-footed, three-footed, and four-footed; and weakest when it has most feet?" No one could find the answer; and Thebes daily paid the toll of life to the monster. The people were in despair, when Laius the King set out to seek counsel at Delphi. Thus the unknown father and son were hourly approaching each other from east and west. Laius was accompanied by only four attendants. When his party came to a narrow pass in Phokis, at a place where three roads met, a young man appeared in the path before them. The slaves of Laius were insolent, and the young man's blood was hot. A quarrel ensued. Three of the attendants were struck down; and Laius himself, aiming at the stranger from his chariot, was killed by a single blow. Œdipus had unwittingly slain his father; and the first part of the curse had fallen.

The fourth attendant of Laius, the very man who had given away Jocasta's babe years before to the Corinthian herdsman, fled for his life. Arrived at Thebes, he reported the death of the King. But he feared to tell the whole truth: he dared not admit that he and his fellows

had been overcome by one man; and he gave out that Laius had been slain by a band of robbers.

Meantime, Œdipus continued his wanderings; and some time afterward he came to Thebes. He found the city still harassed by the Sphinx, who seized her victims daily from among the Theban people. He learned too that their king had been killed by robbers whilst on a journey; and that the old prophet Tiresias, who should have been able to advise the people at such a crisis, was helpless. The young stranger seized his opportunity. He faced the Sphinx and solved her riddle, triumphantly naming the creature of her question to be Man. Whereupon she flung herself down from the hill on which she was stationed; and the people of Thebes at last had rest from their tormentor. They hailed Œdipus with joy; and in their gratitude they named him king in succession to Laius.

But the new King could not put aside the Queen who already occupied the throne. Indeed, by a custom of those old times, he could not rightly become the king unless she married him. He had proved himself to the Theban people brave and wise, a ruler to be desired. Consideration for her people inclined Jocasta to him, and besides, he seemed to her just and kind. But more than all, there hung about him, in his carriage or his manner, something which brought a fleeting memory of Laius, and warmed her heart to him. So she consented that he should be her husband.

The curse on Œdipus was now complete. In perfect innocence, and though he had striven to keep his hands

JOCASTA 140

Gertrude Demain Hammond, R.I.

clean from the horror, he had slain his father and married with his mother. Yet no shadow of the truth fell on him. There were in Thebes two persons to whom it was known, or partly known. One was that slave born in Laius's household who had given the infant Prince to the herdsman from Corinth; and who had fled for his life when his master was killed at the cross-roads in Phokis. The other was the blind old prophet Tiresias. But neither spoke of what they knew. The slave kept silence from loyalty; and coming to the Queen soon after her marriage, he besought her earnestly to send him back to serve in outland parts. Tiresias was merely prudent; and thought it best to bide the time of the god.

For many years no sign came. Jocasta and Œdipus, loving each other and beloved by their people, reigned happily in Thebes; Creon, Jocasta's brother, sharing equally in the honour which was paid to them. Four children were born to the King and Queen: two sons, named Eteocles and Polynices; and two daughters, Antigone and Ismene. Life flowed so smoothly now that painful memories grew faint. Œdipus had almost forgotten the menace that rang in his ears at Delphi twelve years before; and Jocasta, though she would never forget that early act of cruelty, was not haunted so persistently now by the thought of her first-born. It seemed almost that Apollo had relented; that having fulfilled the letter of the doom, he had taken pity on the victims, and would leave them in happy ignorance. But he, too, was only waiting for a fitting moment—till Thebes should be most

flourishing and Œdipus should have reached the top of fame. Then the blow fell. A sudden plague was sent upon the city, which ravaged all life like a blight. Flocks sickened; the harvest failed; and human creatures died in thousands, while Œdipus looked on, sore at heart for their misery, but powerless to help.

At this point of the story, Sophocles has opened the *Œdipus, King of Thebes*. The scene is before the royal palace, where a crowd of suppliants has gathered to implore the aid of the King. Œdipus comes out in person to receive them, and listens patiently while the old priest petitions him on their behalf. They have pathetic faith in him. There can be no doubt that he has power to succour them, for did he not of old save Thebes from the Sphinx? Perhaps too there is a touch of deeper meaning in their act, a hint of that duty laid on early kings, to die for their people in case of need. They come to lay on him the burden of the whole land's sorrow. Œdipus answers them pityingly.

There has appeared to him only one hope; and days before he had grasped at it. He had sent Creon to Apollo's House in Delphi, to inquire of the god what great thing the King must do to save his people. When the answer comes, he vows that he will not flinch. Whatever task Apollo may command, no matter how bitter, it shall be performed.

Even while Œdipus speaks shouts are heard announcing Creon's return; and presently he delivers before them all the answer of the god.

Sophocles : Jocasta

"Thus saith
Phoebus, our Lord and Seer, in clear command:
'An unclean thing there is, hid in our land,
Eating the soil thereof: this ye shall cast
Out, and not foster till all help be past.'" [1]

But what is the unclean thing that is polluting the city? Œdipus does not know that it is himself; and he questions Creon until the oracular command seems clear to him—to hunt out and banish the murderers of Laius. The task seems hopeless. How is it possible, after all these years, to find the men who slew the King? But the oracle has said explicitly that it must be done; that they are still alive within the city; and Œdipus unhesitatingly takes the task upon him.

An assembly of the people is commanded, and Œdipus publicly makes known to them his purpose of tracking the murderers. In a great speech, full of tragic irony, he claims their help in his search. They are Thebans born; but he, a stranger to their town in those days when Laius was killed, had never seen the King. It is for them to seek and render up the men who murdered him. He calls upon them solemnly to reveal what they may know. They need not fear that harm will come to them, for he will promise to befriend the man who does this service to the State. He pauses. But there is of course no answer. Again he appeals to them, growing indignant now, because he believes that they are wilfully shielding the guilty. Will they not speak out, and save their city? Then he will make a decree against them. For those who refuse

to denounce the murderers, they shall be outcast and shelterless, and none shall succour them in living or in dying. For those who will not lend him their active aid in his search, Nature herself shall frown upon them and deny them every blessing; whilst on the man himself who slew the King, the most awful curse shall fall.

As Œdipus, unconscious of what he is doing, invokes this terrible curse upon himself, a blind old man is slowly led in. He is the prophet Tiresias, for whom Œdipus has sent at the suggestion of Creon. He is the only mortal being who knows all the truth; and under peril of the ban that Œdipus has just proclaimed: in virtue of his office, he must needs proclaim it? How will he strike the blow at the great good King? By his sacred calling, and his great age, and his knowledge of the mesh of fate in which Œdipus has been caught, he should be merciful. But as we watch him we have strange doubts. It is not so much that he is unshorn, ragged, and unclean; we have learned to be familiar with such things in these hermit-seers of an early age. But there is something in the lowering brow and twitching mouth that hints of an untamed soul in the unkempt body; and knowing the passionate heart of Œdipus himself, we tremble for the issue.

At first it would seem that our fears are groundless. Œdipus, who is calmer now, greets the prophet with profound respect; and laying bare the oracle, he begs mos humbly for Tiresias's help.

The prophet is calm too, awed by the thought of all that is impending. He answers hesitatingly at first, almost with a touch of pity and regret. He does know who is the murderer of Laius, but—he dare not, he cannot tell. Such a reply could only have one effect upon the tremendous anxiety of the King. Rendered helpless by his ignorance, his own keen wit cannot avail him one iota. He has perforce to ask and ask of these ineffectual creatures around him, only to be thrown back baffled again and again. For one moment he puts a curb upon his rising anger, as he tells Tiresias that his answer is not kind; and casting away all pride and dignity, he kneels at the prophet's feet. But when in sullen words which give no light Tiresias doggedly replies that he will not speak, Œdipus's wrath leaps out at him. Surely this man who knows God's truth and will not declare it is no prophet, but a devil. And is it not probable therefore that he himself has had some hand in the murder of Laius? As the words fall, there is a sudden and malign change in Tiresias; and the dreadful truth which could not be won from him by entreaty, flashes out pitilessly in anger.

> "*So?—I command thee by thine own word's power,*
> *To stand accurst, and never from this hour*
> *Speak word to me, nor yet to those who ring*
> *Thy throne.* Thou art thyself the unclean thing."[1]

But such a wild utterance, smiting through a tempest of passion, carries no shade of conviction to Œdipus. It is but a horrible insult, which this old man, because he is

feeble, thinks he may launch with impunity. Not until it has been thrice repeated does the full significance of it break upon him. Then a suspicion flashes into his mind. This is doubtless some conspiracy against him, prompted by Creon, the brother of his queen, to gain the throne. The foolish improbability of such a plot will not bear reflection for a moment; but the King's impulsive nature is goaded by rage and mistrust. He turns fiercely upon Tiresias and roundly charges him with conspiring against his life.

The prophet retorts with an emphatic denial, but he is not content to stop there. In cold malignance, he repeats his foul accusation against the King, seeming to gloat over every word of the hideous charge and the penalty which his prophetic vision sees that the gods will exact from Œdipus—

> "*Blind, who once had seeing eyes,*
> *Beggared, who once had riches, in strange guise,*
> *His staff groping before him, he shall crawl*
> *O'er unknown earth.*" [1]

To the infuriated King this frightful menace, like the crimes of which he is accused, seems to be the mere raving of madness; and he deigns no answer. The old man is led away; Œdipus enters the palace; and in the pause that follows the Chorus muse over the scene. They are bewildered and torn by doubt. They may not disbelieve the seer, but they cannot and will not believe that their beloved King has been guilty of deeds so vile. As they

sing, Creon rushes on indignant; and he is followed a moment afterward by Œdipus. Here at last is an opportunity to strike out against the deadly thing which seems closing in around him. Creon is no old and blind opponent, before whose weakness his hands are tied; but a man of equal strength and rank whom, in his rashness, he believes to be his bitter enemy. Without a word of prelude or explanation, Œdipus flings down the gauntlet; and declares Creon, his comrade and the brother of his wife, to be a traitor. The charge is false and foolish, to every mind but that of the overwrought King. But reason cannot sway him now; Creon's protests are futile, and his proofs of innocence mere words bereft of meaning. This knave who has plotted against him must die, and quickly, before his schemes can take effect. In vain Creon pleads for justice: in vain the leader of the Chorus tries to stem the King's anger. With a rallying cry to his guards, Œdipus draws his sword upon Creon. But as he springs to the blow there suddenly appears in the doorway of the palace, Jocasta the Queen. An immediate silence falls: weapons are lowered; and the Queen advances slowly to the top of the palace steps. The Chorus move back, leaving Œdipus and Creon standing alone before her. She looks reproachfully into one shamed face after another and then, with gentle dignity, she speaks:

> "*Vain men, what would ye with this angry swell*
> *Of words heart-blinded? Is there in your eyes*
> *No pity, thus, when all our city lies*
> *Bleeding, to ply your privy hates? . . . Alack,*

My lord, come in! Thou, Creon, get thee back
To thine own house. And stir not to such stress
Of peril griefs that are but nothingness." [1]

There is authority in her tone and in her words, none the less compelling because of the tender humanity below them. It calms the disputants: and as they recount to her the cause of the quarrel, emotions ebb and leave the cold facts, hard and ugly. It is clear that Œdipus has been rash in his accusations; and Jocasta counsels him to accept the oath of loyalty that Creon offers. Then, when the peace is made, and she and Œdipus remain alone, she begs him to tell her all that has happened. Œdipus sums the cause of the brawl in a few words—he believes that Creon is plotting against his life, by accusing him, through the instrumentality of Tiresias the seer, of the murder of Laius. At the mention of the seer there is a flash of scorn in Jocasta's eyes, followed by a shadow of pain, as memory brings back the time when she trusted in the vain words of a prophet to her sorrow.

She recounts the story of the oracle that came to Laius, declaring that he should die by the hand of his son; and of the terrible means that they had taken to frustrate it, casting out their child to die upon the mountain.

As Jocasta speaks, we feel that time has not yet healed her wound. The thought of that unnatural deed of her young motherhood is still so horrible to her that though she tries she cannot tell all the truth about it. She says that Laius gave the baby to the slave, whereas it was she herself. Remorse sweeps over her, and the bitterness

which lies just below the surface of her life rises in revolt against the oracle which could tempt to such a deed. There is no impiety in her words. Her voice is reverent when she names the god. But for his corrupt interpreters her acute perception has nothing but contempt. Œdipus will do well to despise them too.

But the King has not observed her emotion. Something that she said about the manner of Laius's death has startled him. He asks her to repeat it. Yes, it was in Phokis, at a place where three roads met; and it happened just before the stranger Œdipus arrived. Œdipus is recalling fearfully his own encounter on such a spot. In growing dread, hurried questions are put and answered; and all the details save one Œdipus finds to correspond with that old event. But that one may save him yet. For the attendant who returned had said that a *band of robbers* slew the King. He must be sent for instantly. Jocasta promises to do so; but may she know all that is troubling him, and whither his questions tend?

> ŒDIPUS. *Thou shalt. When I am tossed to*
> *such an height*
> *Of dark foreboding, woman, when my mind*
> *Faceth such straits as these, where should I find*
> *A mightier love than thine?* [1]

Then, partly because he is instinctively seeking relief from the thoughts that oppress him, partly to refresh Jocasta's memory and to clarify his own mind, he recounts all the story of his early life; of his parents Polybus and

Merope, of his visit to Delphi, of his flight from the oracular decree, of the fierce encounter at the cross-roads in Phokis, and of how he slew the unknown rider in the chariot.

He has one shred of hope, however. If the herdsman who returned spoke truth, clearly Œdipus was not the murderer. Jocasta repeats her promise to send for him, and as she leads the King into the palace she tries to soothe him.

Œdipus sees only one thing yet—that he may be the unwitting murderer. But what need to fear, says the Queen, to comfort him, since the god had said that Laius should be slain at the hands of that poor dead babe? She is not really confident, however. The King's apprehension has secretly seized on her too; and presently she returns from the palace with her maidens, to pray at the altar of Apollo. She lays her husband's grief before the god.

The answer to her prayer is very near; but bringing desolation in the guise of joy. Even as she kneels before the altar there comes a voice calling on the name of the King, as though it were the voice of the god himself. It is a stranger from Corinth; and the Queen rises to receive his greeting.

He is the bearer of good news, he says; a message from the people of Corinth, to Œdipus. They have declared him to be their king, in the place of Polybus, who is dead.

It seems good news indeed. Polybus dead, there is no need now for the anxious King to fear that oracular

menace from Delphi; and Jocasta's heart bounds at the thought.

Œdipus is hurriedly sent for, and, hearing the news confirmed from the lips of the messenger, is caught up suddenly on a wave of exultation. In the violent reaction from his lifelong terror there is a rush of joy which has something sinister in it, by its very excess. Jocasta was right. It was a lying oracle which said he should slay his father; and in the first sense of relief he vows that never again will he trust in seercraft. But the words are hardly cold upon his lips, when he remembers that he has still one other thing to fear. The curse had been, "To slay his father and marry with his mother"; and while Queen Merope lives he must therefore always be an exile from Corinth. But Jocasta is not daunted. Possessed by her conviction that all oracles are false and evil, she tries to reason away his fear.

The Corinthian messenger, too, has caught at Œdipus's words. Does the King fear Merope, believing her to be his mother? And is that the reason why he has never come to Corinth? Then let him set his mind at rest, for he, the herdsman of Polybus, happens to have sure knowledge that Œdipus is not the son of Merope. Œdipus and Jocasta stand amazed; and Œdipus presses the stranger for all that he knows. But at first he will not say more. He repeats that Œdipus is not the son of Polybus and Merope; but he shrinks from disclosing to the great King that he was an unknown foundling. He answers reluctantly to the eager questioning of Œdipus, who is now

hot upon the scent of his mysterious parentage. Blindly, almost feverishly, with no hint of where each step is leading him, he stumbles on. But fear is awakening in Jocasta, as bit by bit the stranger reveals that he himself had given the infant to Polybus. But how came the child to him? And whence? Thus pursues the excited King, while Jocasta stands in silent suspense. The answer of the stranger smites her with a sudden prescience of what is coming. He says he found the babe in a high glen of Kithairon; and as, in rapid answer to the King, he tells of its poor maimed feet and of the Theban herdsman from whom he received it, the full truth falls upon Jocasta with a shattering blow. This man, the King, her husband, is none other than that outcast child, her son. But Œdipus does not see the horror yet; and as she stands rigid at his side one thought and one prayer fill her mind—that he may never know. But some frenzy seems to possess him, driving him to destroy himself. He turns to an officer of the Court. Where is the Theban herdsman of whom the stranger speaks? He must be sought, and made to say whence came the child that he gave to this stranger from Corinth. The officer replies hesitatingly; he thinks he must be the same man who was King Laius's attendant, and who has already been sent for. But only the Queen can tell of his whereabouts. Œdipus turns quickly on Jocasta, and then for the first time sees her anguish. But he has no clue to its cause. He cannot know that there has fallen on her misery worse than death; and that with all the strength of body and soul she is

trying to shield him from it. He can see only a fear, which seems to him contemptible, that he may prove to be base-born. Impatience leaps to anger as she tries to evade his questions; and he replies with a taunt at what he believes to be her pride.

At this word all Jocasta's strength breaks down. The malign power that is driving Œdipus onward is too great for her, and she cannot strive against it any longer. She can only wail in answer:

> *"O child of woe,*
> *I pray God, I pray God, thou never know!"* [1]

And then, as Œdipus turns roughly from her, all his tenderness shrivelled to scorn and wrath, the last link snaps. In another moment he will know the truth; and knowing it, she will be loathsome and abhorrent in his eyes. The thought brings intolerable pain. She craves relief, escape, and, swiftly—before Œdipus can learn what he is seeking, before his accusing eyes can meet her own —annihilation. With an imploring gesture, she takes one step toward him.

> *"Unhappy one, good-bye! Good-bye before*
> *I go: this once, and never, never more!"* [1]

But Œdipus does not heed her; and with wild eyes, she flies into the palace, to die by her own hand. And when the great King, brought at last to see the truth which casts him lower than the meanest slave, thinks to avenge his wrongs on her, he finds that she has taken vengeance

on herself. Before her pitiful dead body his wrath is turned to loathing of himself; and the hand that was raised against her smites the light for ever from his own eyes.

[1] From Professor Gilbert Murray's translation of the *Œdipus, King of Thebes* (George Allen and Unwin, Ltd.).

Sophocles: Antigone

THERE was an important figure in *Œdipus the King* whom we only glanced at in passing when we were considering the story of Jocasta. He was the Queen's own brother, Creon; a man who knew better than to covet kingly honours, and who had a soul for friendship. It was he who said, answering the rash accusation which Œdipus made against him:

> "*This I tell thee. He who plucks a friend*
> *Out from his heart hath lost a treasured thing*
> *Dear as his own dear life.*" [1]

Thus, when the great King's downfall came, Creon knew how to be a friend. He was gentle to Œdipus; and forgetting his own wrongs, he took upon himself the care of the King's young daughters, Antigone and Ismene.

But Creon said once, at another crowded moment of his career:

> "*Hard it is to learn*
> *The mind of any mortal or the heart,*
> *Till he be tried in chief authority.*
> *Power shows the man.*" [3]

It was a true word, and curiously verified in his own life. For he who had shown so fair a front in Thebes, when the reins of government lay in the hands of Œdipus

and Jocasta, proved himself a tyrant when authority fell on him. Creon, young and ardent, could dare the wrath of Œdipus, and tell him to his face that even a king might not be unjust. But the same man clothed in power, with youthful ideals fled and all the texture of his mind hardened by age and convention, could only meet the supreme idealism of Antigone with a decree of death.

It is not suggested that Sophocles has developed Creon's character in an unbroken sequence through the three dramas in which he appears. The chronology of the plays forbids this. For the *Antigone*, which presents the last phase of the story, was written years before *Œdipus the King* and the *Œdipus at Colonus*, which give us both Antigone and Creon in earlier days. But that is an external fact which does not much disturb the unity of the poet's conception. The Creon of the three plays is essentially the same man. He is not consistent always, since no human creature is. But under that accusing contrast between the theories of his youth and the practice of his age there is an abiding law of human nature which only the few fine souls escape. And we are clearly shown that Creon was not born to be the rare exception. Always prudent, law-abiding, and careful of authority, these qualities would strengthen with the years; and lighted by no higher truth, but carried to excess in moments of passion, would inevitably make him what he became.

In the same way there is an underlying unity in the character of Antigone. In *Œdipus the King* we know her only by name, a child of thirteen into whose sunny life a

storm has suddenly crashed. In the *Œdipus at Colonus*, the strong young spirit has awakened, and is giving clear promise of the heights to which it will soar before its short day is done. While the *Antigone*, the drama which bears her name, does but fulfil and make perfect what is fair promise in the other plays.

We are entitled therefore, in coming to the Attic dramatists for Antigone's story, to read the three Sophoclean plays as if they were a trilogy; although each of the three is distinct and complete in itself. And we shall find too, that in the *Seven against Thebes* of Æschylus, in which Antigone first appears, there is sounded once for all the high heroic note to which her story moved in the versions of the later poets. There is indeed a wealth of testimony for Antigone, and fine unanimity in it. We can trace her short life almost throughout. There was the happy early time in Thebes, when royalty sat lightly on the merry boys and girls in the palace; and when the great King and Queen were simply their dear and loving parents. That was a time of sweetest memories. Ambition had not yet taught the two spirited brothers to hate each other; and Ismene was still the gentle little sister who would follow with unquestioning devotion wherever Antigone might lead.

But in one black day, and with no warning given, every ray of happiness had been blotted out. Of all the sights and sounds huddled into the memory of that hideous day, Antigone could only recall two things clearly—the stately Queen her mother lying dead by her own hand;

and Œdipus the King, self-blinded, pleading in strange remorse outside the palace to be banished from the city. But one impression, filtering almost unconsciously through her terror, remained and grew. It was the look of horror, almost of loathing, on every face that surrounded the unhappy King. Antigone herself could hardly bear to see him; but she vaguely felt that in these shrinking figures there was something more than physical revulsion at the sight. Why did the crowding people, the senators, even Prince Creon himself, draw away from her father as though he were some unclean thing whose touch would pollute them? That they did so stung her; and although their terrified recoil was only dimly realized at the time, it brought a flood of pity and indignation with it. In the wave of protecting love that filled her heart, making her long to fling herself between the dear maimed father and all those cruel glances, Antigone the woman sprang to a noble life.

She did not grow to full stature immediately. Years passed, and Creon, assuming rule in Thebes as regent for her brothers, prevailed on Œdipus to seclude himself within the city. Time brought sad knowledge to Antigone. She learned the causes of the tragedy that had fallen on them, as it seemed, out of a blue sky. She found, too, the meaning of that frantic abhorrence of her father; though she never learned to share it. Neither intellect nor heart would consent to hold him guilty: not by one iota was he responsible for the evils that had smitten him. So, as his own brain cleared from the shock of the

calamity, Œdipus found a champion in his daughter whose splendid logic and whose love were alike invincible.

Later he had need of all Antigone's courage. For faction sprang to life in the city and grew fast. Superstition fed it eagerly, and soon there was but one thought in all the darkened mind of Thebes, from Creon downward. Their town, in sheltering Œdipus, was harbouring pollution; and he must be cast out. The people clamoured fanatically; but Creon and the princes Polynices and Eteocles made no stand against them. To them, the presence of Œdipus was a political embarrassment, as well as an alleged cause of displeasure to the gods. Thus ambition united with fear to drive them on; and presently, his unnatural sons consenting, Œdipus was ruthlessly cast out of Thebes.

There was only one voice uplifted in his defence; but a woman's word, though it might be the soul of right, had no value in the counsels of the State. Œdipus went into exile alone: poor, blind, and dogged by the curse which his cruel destiny had invoked upon him. But he did not wander long unfriended.

Antigone,
E'er since her childhood ended, and her frame
Was firmly knit, with ceaseless ministry
Still tends upon an old man's wandering,
Oft in the forest ranging up and down
Fasting and barefoot through the burning heat
Or pelting rain, nor thinks, unhappy maid,
Of home or comfort, so her father's need
Be satisfied.[2]

Year after year they wandered together, haunting the glens and groves of Mount Kithairon, where the infant Œdipus had been exposed. It seemed as if his destiny were calling him to render up his life there on the spot which had seen the beginning of his wrongs. But the gods relented a little at last. There came to Œdipus a divine message that he should have honour at the end, and a glorious passing. He should not know the death of a mortal creature. He was to fare to Athens, and in the little deme of Colonus, at the place which was sacred to Poseidon and Prometheus, the awful Powers of the Underworld would welcome him, living, to their shadowy empire.

To Colonus, then, Œdipus and Antigone wearily came; and threw themselves on the protection of Theseus. They were strange suppliants, hardly auspicious in the eyes of the Athenian folk before whom Antigone pleaded for succour. And the message which Œdipus sent to their king was stranger still, as he repeated the promise that Apollo had given him:

> *"When I should reach my bourne,*
> *And find repose and refuge with the Powers*
> *Of reverent name, my troubled life should end*
> *With blessing to the men who sheltered me,*
> *And curses on their race who banished me*
> *And sent me wandering forth."* [2]

Even in dying, it seemed, his life should have no peace. There was still one act of wrath to do: the stormy day

must needs go out in storm. When he stood before Theseus, to declare his name and history, all the unquiet flux of life seemed sweeping round him still.

Theseus took pity on the poor blind King and gave him refuge. But meantime, away in Thebes, his sons were quarrelling about the succession to the throne. Eteocles and Creon had stirred up the people against Polynices; and he, too, was banished from the kingdom. But he had strength and influence. He fled to Argos, married the daughter of King Adrastus there, and presently had raised an army, with six other Greek chiefs, to invade his native country. This incident is the subject of Æschylus's drama called the *Seven against Thebes*.

On the eve of the battle, Polynices remembered Œdipus. His own misfortunes had taught him remorse for the part which he had played against his outcast father; and a conviction weighed on him that no enterprise of his might succeed until he had begged forgiveness and a blessing. So he travelled hastily to Colonus; and in fear both of his father and of Theseus, he flung himself as a suppliant at the altar of Poseidon. But in the heart of Œdipus anger still burned; and in his ears still sounded the last oracular command—to curse these impious sons before he died. At first he refused even to see Polynices, when Theseus brought word of his petition; and only yielded to Antigone's plea that he should at least give her brother a hearing.

But from the first there was no hope of a softer mood in

Œdipus. Grimly he listened while Polynices poured out his plea for forgiveness, and when all was said, broke into the curse which was to devastate his children's lives. Never should the crime of Polynices and Eteocles be forgiven; but in this battle, when each hoped to win glory and the throne of Thebes, both should fall, slain each by the other's hand.

The siege of Thebes was thus foredoomed; and Antigone implored her brother to abandon the enterprise. But he was committed to it beyond recall; and went to meet failure and certain death. One solemn request he made of her and of Ismene too, at their farewell. When he should lie dead before Thebes, would she promise him the last holy act of burial? There would be no other kin to perform the rite, and if it were not done, his ghost must wander endlessly and find no rest.

No oath could bind Antigone more strongly than the prompting of her love; but she gave her word to Polynices, so that he might go untroubled by a dread more awful than any other to a Greek. And when the testing time came, both love and duty were irrevocably engaged. It came very soon. On the day that the Seven laid siege to Thebes, the gods took Œdipus. In marvellous fashion he left the earth, rapt away in the thunders of Olympus, while mighty voices called upon his name. And as, unseen by mortal eyes, he crossed that mysterious Brazen Causeway, the Argive army lay round Thebes. When Antigone and Ismene returned to the city, dreadful tidings were brought to them. Their brothers had met

ŒDIPUS AND ANTIGONE 162

From the sculpture by Hugues in the Luxembourg

in single combat, and, fighting furiously, each had slain the other.

Creon instantly assumed control. The Argive host was beaten back, and when the next day dawned the invading force was gone. The siege was over; and Thebes might set about the pious task of burying its dead. The Princes were taken up from the spot where they had fallen, and brought into the city. By the most sacred law of Greek religion every ceremony of burial should now be reverently performed. The duty devolved first on male kindred; and Creon, as uncle to the Princes, should perform the rites. But Creon was now King of Thebes; and in that capacity there fell on him another, and a conflicting, duty. He must decide what burial honours might fittingly be paid to Polynices, the traitor who had fought against his country.

Antigone waited in anxiety for the decision. For Eteocles she had no fear; he had given no offence to Thebes. But she knew Creon's rigorous spirit; she knew his devotion to the State; and she trembled for the poor misguided brother who had sinned against the State. In the early morning after the battle, Antigone came out of the palace, to meet the procession which bore her brothers' bodies in. And as she joined her voice to the mourners' wail, Creon's herald broke upon their grief, to announce the king's decree.

Eteocles was to be buried with due solemnity, but the body of his brother Polynices was to be "cast forth for dogs to tear." For him the customary rites are forbidden.

But Creon had reckoned without Antigone. Her utmost apprehension had not dreamed that so cruel an edict could be passed. It was foul dishonour to the dead, and an insult to the gods. But she would never suffer it. Though she must be one woman against the whole of Thebes, her brother should not lack the necessary rites.

At this point of the story, the *Antigone* of Sophocles opens. Creon has heard a rumour of defiance, and has added a penalty of death to his decree. The sisters are alone outside the palace. Antigone, not doubting of Ismene for a moment, rapidly puts before her a plan for Polynices' burial. They must act at once, quickly and quietly, before Creon may have time to prevent them. To her utter amazement, however, Ismene will not help her. She is a gentle, timid creature: she cannot think it possible that Antigone will dare to defy Creon's edict: the mere suggestion terrifies her. She cannot rise to Antigone's perception of a law higher than this ugly mandate against the dead; and if she could, she is not of the heroic fibre to make a stand against authority. She sees and admits that this vengeful edict must needs offend the gods; but for her part, she can only pray to be held guiltless of it. She is not lacking in love and loyalty to her kin. When Œdipus and Antigone were wandering in beggary, Ismene had secretly contrived to send them aid; and once she had ridden a perilous journey in order to warn them of danger. She is no craven. Only, she is oppressed by a sense of physical weakness: the forces which Antigone will challenge are overwhelming, and will

surely crush her. Is it not rash and sinful to attempt the impossible?

Antigone is bitterly disappointed. She had gauged Ismene by herself, and thought her courage would be equal to her love. To her the duty to their dead is a holy act, crying aloud for fulfilment, and shining far above this tyrannous decree. It is so clear to her eager spirit that she cannot doubt or hesitate.

With a bitter word on her lips, she goes out alone to face her perilous task.

Ismene, left standing before the palace, gives one involuntary cry of mingled fear and admiration. Then the thought of Antigone's danger overwhelms her, and she rushes within like one distracted.

In the Parados which follows, sung by a Chorus of Theban elders, we are made to feel with growing force the isolation of Antigone. For they sing of the Argive attack, and of the sin of Polynices in bringing an army against Thebes. They are old men, and cannot be expected to share the ardent enthusiasm of youth; and being senators, their greatest care must be to uphold the State against its enemies. When Creon enters, heralded with pomp and ceremony, they are tempered to the dry official mood which will exactly suit his purpose.

Creon is newly burdened with the weight of monarchy; and in this his first public proclamation it seems to oppress him. There is an evident anxiety in his tone as he repeats the edict that he has made against Polynices. It seems, despite the authority of his words, as though he were

trying to justify the decree, not only to possible critics among his hearers, but to an inner malcontent who will not be silenced. With all the strength of words, he emphasises his devotion to the State; and from our knowledge of Creon, we realize that this is something more than mere protestation. The glory of Thebes shall be his constant aim and utmost care, he says. Her friends he will exalt, and her enemies shall be his enemies.

With this prelude, he comes fittingly to the terms of the edict. Eteocles, who died fighting for his country, shall receive every tribute that the State can pay; but the traitor who could betray his country to an enemy shall be justly left dishonoured, for carrion to devour. As we listen to the speech we are compelled to admit its stern logic. We see that Creon's action is not entirely arbitrary, so far. There is, according to his standard, rigorous justice in it; and no other standard had yet been applied. The Chorus would not question it. It is in the main an echo of their own thought; only it looks a little harsh, put into words. They, too, believe Polynices guilty of an unpardonable crime against the country that they serve; and they have no wish to gainsay Creon. But about this vengeance taken on the dead there seems to be a certain degree of excess, which forbids entire approval. At any rate, they will take no responsibility for it. "It is thine," they reply to the King, "to exercise all power." They will not take upon themselves to criticize the action of their king, though it may cause uneasiness; and on the

other hand, they dare not censure it. He is in authority, and they must submit.

Creon then proceeds to explain that he has set a watch over Polynices' body. But even while he is speaking there shuffles on the scene a curious, half-comic figure, announcing that the edict has been defied. He is one of the sentinels set to guard the corpse. In brusque speech, and with exaggerated fear for his own life, he tells a strange tale. At the first light of morning, he and his companions found that some unknown hand had given the Prince his funeral rites: not the full and complete ceremony, but just so much as to give peace to the unquiet spirit.

Creon's judicial air vanishes in a moment. Astonishment quickly gives place to anger as he listens; and this is only heightened when the Chorus suggest that some god has interposed to pay the burial rites. Startled by the strange recital, their words betray an involuntary glimpse of the misgiving that underlies their submission to the King. Creon breaks into angry speech. The insult to his authority stings his new-found sense of power; but when the senators imply that the gods themselves disapprove of his action, some prick of the unacknowledged truth goads him to fury. And below his wrath there lies a suspicion of disloyalty amongst the citizens, and corruption amongst his slaves.

Not the gods, he says, but these same watchmen who were set to guard the body, have performed the rites. And they have done it for gain; set on by rebels who will

not accept his rule. Driven by complex emotions, he loses all sense of restraint; and threatens the sentinel with torture and death if he does not find and bring the culprit immediately. Then he strides into the palace, and the man flings off with a gibe.

In the short interval which follows, the Chorus sing aptly and beautifully of the daring and skill of man. But their ode soon breaks into excited exclamations. They see the watchman who but lately left them returning hurriedly and leading a woman by the hand. At the same moment Creon enters.

> CHORUS. *What portent from the gods*
> *is here?*
> *My mind is mazed with doubt and fear.*
> *How can I gainsay what I see?*
> *I know the girl Antigone.*
> *O hapless child of hapless sire!*
> *Didst thou, then, recklessly aspire*
> *To brave kings' laws, and now art brought*
> *In madness of transgression caught?* [3]

Her captor is exultant, for he has disproved the charge against himself. Not that it gives him pleasure to betray the kind young Princess; but everybody's life is precious to himself, he says, not seeing one gleam of the splendid scorn of life in the girl who is standing beside him. This maid is undoubtedly the transgressor, for they caught her in the act. Now let the King acquit him of the false accusation, and set him free.

Before the man may go, however, Creon turns to Anti-

gone. She stands pale and silent, her eyes lowered before the incredulous gaze of all these hostile men. Does she confirm the amazing statement they have just heard? he asks. It is quite true, she answers; she owns to the deed. Then Creon, having dismissed the watchman, demands to be told why she has dared to disobey his edict. Antigone's reply, with all its spiritual power and beauty, is also touchingly human.

Up to this point her ardent vision and courage have carried her on, soaring high into the light of eternal truth, or tenderly stooping to the sanction of dear human ties. The austerity of the stern faces by which she is surrounded has had no power to quell her fervent spirit; and it is only when she catches Creon's look of contempt that a bitter reality forces itself upon her. This passion of self-sacrifice, this duty which comes to her as a mandate from the gods themselves, is stark nonsense in the eyes of the man who confronts her. The thought gives a sudden pause to her ardour, and there is a quick revulsion to anger. O these blind eyes that will not see! And this stupidity that refuses to be enlightened! She drops to a lower range, and ends abruptly on a taunt at Creon's dullness of perception:

> "*And if thou deem'st me foolish for my deed,*
> *I am foolish in the judgment of a fool.*"

The Chorus has relapsed into submission to Creon. No spark of fire from Antigone's burning words can warm their coldness. Yet their frigid comment is significant.

How like she is, in her strong will, to Œdipus, her sire. Creon takes up their words. Yes, she is stubborn, but the hardest metal will soonest break. Not content with disobedience, she must glory in her deed. But she shall surely die for it; and Ismene, too, if she has been an accomplice.

Antigone had expected no less than the death penalty for herself; but she will by no means allow Ismene to be included in it. For, first, Ismene had refused her help; and then, she is too slight and weak a creature for such a terrible ordeal. Antigone sees that there is a sharp struggle coming. Some attendants have brought her sister from the palace, and she comes weeping for Antigone's fate. Creon turns upon her in a fury. Without a sign of proof, he roundly accuses her of complicity in the deed.

To Ismene, who does not know what has passed, it seems clear that Antigone has in some way implicated her. But she will not deny it. On the contrary, there is in her tender heart some sense of relief, despite her fear, that she can now prove to Antigone her loyalty. Ever since she first refused her help, remorse has stung her. But now there is an opportunity to redeem her weakness, and she makes a pathetic attempt to share Antigone's fate. It is not a very bold effort, however: she seems almost to tremble as she tells Creon that she *did* help in the burial —if Antigone said so; and none but a man who was blind with rage could have been deceived by it. But to Creon the poor little declaration has all the appearance of truth;

and Antigone, knowing his inexorable nature, sees that he will assuredly condemn Ismene to death. She must interpose, quickly and decisively. She is still sore with disappointment at her sister; her own burden, since the glow of her magnificent defence passed, has grown heavier at every moment; and there is, moreover, a very natural resentment that Ismene should claim merit where it is not due. She breaks in with an emphatic denial of her sister's help.

Hurt and baffled, Ismene now turns to Creon with an appeal that she thinks must touch him. Will he not save Antigone for Hæmon's sake, his son, to whom she is betrothed? Surely he will not break the heart of his own child, too? His reply is a brutal jest that wrings from Antigone the first sign of her anguish.

Then she is led away by the guards.

Almost immediately there enters upon the scene a man who is much better fitted to cope with Creon. He is Hæmon, Antigone's lover. Logical, restrained, and of considerable force of character, he possesses besides a valuable key to his father's temperament. He knows the man with whom he has to deal, and adopts a quiet, conciliatory tone, deferring from the first to Creon's rights as his father and his king. He listens with apparent calm to the arraignment of Antigone; and makes no reply when Creon expounds his doctrine of absolute obedience to the laws of the State, be they right or wrong. He even controls himself at the rough exhortation to "cast her off, to wed with some one down below."

But Hæmon is only biding his time; and when his father concludes, he begins, tactfully and with moderation, to put before him the only plea which he thinks has any hope of influencing him. He appeals to Creon in his public capacity, and asks him to consider the opinion of the citizens of Thebes upon Antigone's action.

With fine delicacy, and holding his emotions well in check, Hæmon hints that his father will do well to listen to the voice of the people. No human creature is infallible; and is it not unwise to cling too tenaciously to one's own will in the face of so strong a public opinion? The tree that will not yield to the torrent is torn up by the roots; and the sailor who rushes into the teeth of the storm with sheets taut is liable to end his voyaging keel-upward.

Creon interposes an angry exclamation; he will not be taught discretion by a boy. But Hæmon is ready with an answer—Even age must yield to truth and justice. Antigone is no base rebel: all Thebes denies it. "Am I ruled by Thebes?" thunders Creon; and Hæmon, seeing his father lost to reason, begins to feel the onrush of despair that will presently sweep away his self-control. In the wave of emotion that breaks upon him, he answers hotly to Creon's taunts. It is the one thing needed to complete his father's wrath; and he turns with a brutal order to the Guards to bring Antigone out, that she may die before her lover's eyes. But Hæmon will not look upon that sight. Under his quiet manner, a torrent of passion has been gathering force; and a terrible resolu-

tion. He has been keeping an iron hand upon himself; but he has known all through his pleading that if Creon will dare to carry out the sentence against Antigone, it will cost him the life of his son. Hæmon will not survive his bride. Now, with an ominous cry that his father shall never see his face again, he rushes from the place.

The Chorus break into an exquisite lyric on the power of love; and a few moments afterward Antigone herself crosses the scene, on her way to the place of death. She is to be buried alive, in a rocky tomb in the hills; and this last horror, with the inevitable reaction that has followed on her splendid daring, have wrought a pathetic change in her. All her audacity has gone: the passion of righteous anger has faded out: even her perception is blunted. The vision of a higher law, and the superb confidence that the gods approve her action, have grown dull and faint before this dreadful thing which is coming to her. Her voice falters: her footsteps lag: and on her lips are pitiful words of regret for all the fair things that she is leaving. The old senators are moved, but are sadly inept in their efforts at consolation. Remembering Antigone as she had faced them in her magnificent heroism, they think to comfort her with the thought that there is glory in her death. But Antigone is not heroic now. She is a lonely human soul, confronting the last grim reality; and the well-turned phrases of these comfortable old men are revolting to her. What glory can really compensate for the monstrous injustice that she suffers; for the loss of youth,

and lover, and friends; and for the hideous darkness that will quench the light of the sun for her?

Even faith seems swept away for a moment in this access of physical weakness. But a gleam comes back, flickering through the clouds of doubt upon that shadowy region of the Underworld:

> "*Dear will my coming be, father, to thee,*
> *And dear to thee, my mother, and to thee,*
> *Brother! since with these very hands I decked*
> *And bathed you after death, and ministered*
> *The last libations.*" [3]

Then the clouds gather again, and she cannot see anything clearly. Why is she suffering so? Is it possible that she is guilty, that her deed was wrong? In the strange confusion of her soul, truth itself seems to reel, and the form of piety grows blurred. What if, after all, the gods do *NOT* approve, and it is she who has sinned?

But from this most ghastly fear Creon himself unwittingly delivers her. He breaks suddenly into her mourning with a harsh order; and instantly her mind grows clear.

Beside the perverse authority of Creon, her integrity rises unassailable. So Antigone passes, in light at the last.

It would take too long to tell of the punishment which befell Creon, which is nevertheless a vital part of Sophocles's *Antigone*. It was swift and crushing. No sooner had the

Princess been led to her rocky tomb than the seer Tiresias demanded an audience of the King. He had come with solemn warnings from the gods, first because the body of Polynices, the burial of which Antigone had not been allowed to complete, was polluting the city; and secondly because his shameful cruelty to the Princess had given the gods offence. Let Creon go at once and rescue Antigone from her living tomb; and let him pay the needful honours to the dead. But if he will not instantly make this just amend, the divine power will surely exact from him the payment of a life for the life that he has taken.

Creon has no recourse to authority now; and he makes but a feeble resistance. Misguided and over-zealous hitherto, he is no sooner convinced of his error by the prophet than he makes a strenuous effort to put it right. He is shaken by fear, too; and declares that he cannot fight with destiny. So he goes to perform the will of the gods; and on his action now the whole force of the tragedy hangs. The gods had commanded—Release Antigone first, and then bury the body. But Creon in his perturbation had not paid good heed. True to his nature, he turns to the official duty first, the burial that is to remove pollution from the city. Characteristically, too, he stays to perform the rites with the utmost amplitude. Not until a mound has been heaped upon Polynices does he proceed to the cave to release Antigone. Then he is too late. Antigone has hanged herself from the rocky roof, and Hæmon is clinging about her feet in agony. As Creon appears, the youth springs up with

intent to kill him; but missing his aim, he turns the sword against himself and dies by Antigone's side.

So the gods exacted a life for a life; but the punishment was not yet complete. When Creon, broken with grief, came carrying his dead son into the palace, he found that the tragic news had been before him. Eurydice his wife had slain herself.

[1] From Professor Gilbert Murray's translation of the *Œdipus, King of Thebes* (George Allen and Unwin, Ltd.).

[2] From Professor Lewis Campbell's translation of the *Œdipus at Colonus* (Oxford University Press).

[3] From Professor Lewis Campbell's translation of the *Antigone* (Oxford University Press).

Euripides: Alcestis

IN the story of Alcestis, we step at once into light and sweet air. Here is no taint of an hereditary curse; no excess of passion to offend the sight of gods and men; no foul crime to be avenged by other crime, and expiated in its turn by bitter remorse. We come to a new theme, fair as a garden and clean as a morning breeze. It is the tale of a wife's supreme love: of the friendship of a god for a mortal man: of an unique act of hospitality and its magnificent requital. The oppressive sense of destiny, of something almost malign in the heart of things, has lifted. Human error and wrong-doing and impotence, which have hitherto made such a sombre background for heroic figures, are lost in a glow of human love. And instead of a brooding menace, there is the presence of a benign divinity, seeking to protect and recompense virtue.

The character of Admetus is of some importance in the story we are now to consider, and hence has received a great deal of attention. It has been interpreted variously. On the one hand he is made to appear improbably base, a poltroon who was not only willing that his wife should die in his stead, but who hurried her to the tomb with indecent haste, to avoid the awkward questions of her relatives. On the other hand he is shown as incredibly virtuous, a man whom the gods delighted to honour—

with this doubtful gift of life at another's cost—and who could not, from very piety, refuse it. But the Admetus of Euripides is not found in either of these two extremes. He is a much more real figure poised somewhere along a middle line between the two; an average man, compounded of good and bad: a warm friend, a tender husband, generously hospitable and of evident charm of nature; but with a fatal weakness of will. Thus, in the common level which the balance shows, he is much more convincing as a man, and for the purpose of the dramatist, an excellent foil to his heroic wife.

In the lovely poem by William Morris on this subject, there is a picture of King Admetus which glows with just the charm that such a nature might possess. The poem, which is called *The Love of Alcestis*, relates that part of the legend which precedes the climax treated by Euripides. It tells of the coming of the god Apollo to Thessaly, to serve as an unknown herdsman to Admetus, King of Pheræ, for nine long years; of Admetus's wooing of the young daughter of Pelias, King of Iolchos, and of the impossible condition (fulfilled, however, by the divine herdsman's aid) that whoever would wed with Alcestis must fetch her for her bridal in a chariot drawn by a lion and a boar. It tells, too, of the god's help in foiling the spells of Artemis over the bride; of the happy wedded life; and of the departure of Apollo, leaving with the royal couple what seemed at first a priceless boon—the promise that when Admetus came to die, another life should be accepted by the Fates in his stead.

This is the man whose gracious serenity first won the love of the god when, banished from Olympus, he came to serve as a thrall.

He stretched an eager hand to the young stranger who knelt at his feet, begging hospitality, and promising rich rewards.

From that moment, there was a tender comradeship between the King and his new herdsman, which only grew stronger with time. Now and then, strange tokens made Admetus wonder about his guest's identity; but he refrained from questioning him, and it was not until the last day of the appointed service that the revelation came. The King's sweet bride had been won ere then; brought home to Pheræ in an ivory chariot which the stranger had marvellously provided, drawn by a lion and a boar; and the circle of their happiness seemed complete.

But one soft evening, when the sun was sinking, the herdsman drew the King out of the palace; and together they climbed the hill to watch the sun go down. There fell on Admetus a sense of sadness, and soon he was aware of a wonderful change in the figure at his side. He dared not raise his eyes, for he was conscious of glory which might not be looked upon. Awe filled him, and now he knew the meaning of his sadness. This mysterious guest who had been so strong and wise and kind a friend, was leaving him. As he stood trembling, in dread and sorrow, the dear voice that he loved fell on his ear once more, thrilling him with its music:

"Fear not! I love thee . . .
And now my servitude with thee is done,
And I shall leave thee toiling on thine earth,
This handful, that within its little girth
Holds that which moves you so, O men that die;
Behold, to-day thou hast felicity,
But the times change, and I can see a day
When all thine happiness shall fade away;
And yet, be merry, strive not with the end,
Thou canst not change it; for the rest, a friend
This year hath won thee who shall never fail." [1]

It is on this note of divine favour that the *Alcestis* of Euripides opens. In the golden interval since Apollo took his flight from Pheræ toward the setting sun, life had sped joyously for Admetus and his lovely queen. The hint of ill to come which had dropped from the god's lips was to the King but a fleck on a fair horizon, the measure of pain that every man must bear—some day. But it was too remote for present heeding. Why fret away the day of youth because of sorrow and death that must come to all alike at the end? So he lived merrily, as the god had counselled, his fruitful land at peace with all the world, and his doors flung wide to the stranger and the suppliant. The little cloud was quite forgotten.

Alcestis was happy too, with a difference. Deep under the bright surface of her life, the warning of the god lay hidden. It never rose to disturb her husband's boyish gaiety, nor to trouble with its shadow the sunny eyes of her little ones. But it was not lulled to sleep. Alcestis

could not palter with reality. In quiet times the black thing was called up from its hiding place, and faced and fought. There was many an hour of anguish before it was finally conquered, since youth and beauty and happiness are precious. But from the moment when Alcestis learned that love was greater than them all—when she pledged her soul to take upon herself the evil that was coming to her husband, life grew calm and fair again. There was little outward sign to mark the struggle: only a gentle gravity crept into her sweetness, and her voice grew tenderer still to husband and to babes. And she too clutched the hope, since she was human after all, that the thing she feared was still far away.

Very soon, however, and with bewildering suddenness, the little cloud gathered into storm. The fiat went out from the Moiræ that Admetus was to die—now, in the glory of youth and strength, a goodly prize to enrich the House of Hades. One favour only they would grant, at the supplication of Apollo for his mortal friend—that the King might live if father or mother or wife would consent to die for him. Admetus, unprepared for an ordeal which must shake so slight a nature to its roots; and with all his kindly social virtues rent by the shock, forgot his manhood.

The old people clung feverishly to their remnant of dear life; and Alcestis knew that this was the moment when the compact that she had made with her own soul must be ratified to the powers below. She gave her word to the Fates that she would die for her husband.

Now the appointed day has come; and before the palace of Admetus a grim contest is in progress. Guarding the door with his splendid presence is the great Sun-god himself, making a last stand against Hades, lord of the dead, who has come in person from the Underworld to claim his victim. He may not use force against this shadowy king; but with all the strength of persuasion he pleads for Alcestis's life. "My heart is heavy for my friend's mischance," he says; and tries to touch the obdurate spirit by the thought of this noble wife's youth and goodness. But Death will yield no jot to his entreaty; and as Apollo reluctantly gives place to him, vanquished for the moment, he flings a threat at the great Enemy.

But Death passes on unheeding, and there gather slowly before the doors the friends who have been summoned to mourn for the dying Queen. They are awed by the hush that lies upon the house, and hardly know how to interpret it. Perhaps it means that Alcestis is already dead, they conjecture; and that the funeral train has left the palace. Yet this can hardly be.

No, they would rather surmise that Alcestis is living still; and as one of the Queen's maids comes out, they beg eagerly for news. The girl tells them through tears that her mistress does indeed still live, but that the end is very near. Even now, in quiet courage, the Queen is performing all the needful rites.

The maid goes on to tell of Admetus's grief. Clasping his wife in his arms, he begs her not to leave him. But she is growing rapidly weaker, and his entreaties hardly pierce

the darkness that is settling down on mind and body. She craves for air and light, just to look once more on the glorious sun, and feel the breath of heaven. As Admetus carries her out, followed by their two young children, she utters one bitter cry of regret for all the beauty that she must leave.

Then the presence of imminent death rises on her fading sight. She sees the sinister Ferryman Charon beckoning with impatient finger, and she hears him calling her to hasten.

There has been no word of farewell to Admetus yet; and now she gathers strength for the last thing that must be said to him. Perhaps she has been waiting, all through his evident grief and broken words of devotion, for some hint of awakening to a nobler spirit. Perhaps she has longed, in hope that she knew to be vain, for one word of remorse, one flash of protest, though it were too late, against the sacrifice that she is making. But Admetus gives no sign; he is absorbed in his own suffering; and we seem to hear, all through the solemn charge which the dying lips lay upon him, a note of pain.

Admetus promises all, and more, than she asks. He will never wed again, but will mourn her always. There shall be no more revelry in Pheræ; he will not touch his lyre again, nor sing. Her death has robbed his life of mirth; and all his longing will be to come to her.

The eager protestations bring some comfort to her passing spirit, and she tenderly commends the children to him. Then:

ALCESTIS. *Dark—dark—mine eyes are drooping, heavy-laden.*
ADMETUS. *O, I am lost if thou wilt leave me, wife!*
ALCESTIS. *No more—I am no more. . . .*
Farewell.[2]

Amid the wailing of her children, and the mournful chant of the Chorus, the body of Alcestis is carried into the house, Admetus following to prepare the funeral rites.

The scene then quickly changes, lifting the gloom of death for a moment. The mourning ode rises, in vague sweet longing for power to bring Alcestis back from the grave. And hardly has it ceased when there arrives at the palace, claiming hospitality in cheery confidence, Heracles the hero of many toils, and the destined deliverer of Alcestis. He is a creature of immense interest to the people gathered around the doors, for are not his valour and endurance known and marvelled at throughout the whole of Greece? He is weary with travel, but he hales them blithely, asking for the King; and when they ply him with questions, he tells all his errand with free good-nature. His taskmaster, Eurystheus King of Tiryns, has laid yet another labour upon him, harder and more perilous than all the rest. He is commanded to go to wintry Thrace, the land of the Bistones, and capture from King Diomedes there the fierce man-eating mares that draw his chariot. The Chorus, enthralled by his story, remind him of the prowess of the man whom he must conquer, and that he is descended from the God of War himself. But the hero

replies that he will not shrink from the task; only, as he has already come far upon his journey, he needs rest and refreshment first. He comes unhesitatingly to his friend Admetus, knowing from of old his unfailing hospitality; and there is about the hero such a glow of exuberant life and strength, his history and his present adventure are things so fascinating to his hearers, that they have for the moment completely forgotten the sorrow that weighs upon their royal master. No single word of it has been uttered when Admetus himself, apprised of his friend's arrival, comes out of the palace to welcome him.

An embarrassed silence falls upon the mourners. They know that they should have made known to Heracles at once the calamity which had befallen Pheræ in the loss of their queen. Then he could have sought the bounty of some other house, and the grief of their king need not have been intruded upon. But while they have been lost in eager talk, an attendant has called Admetus; and on him now will fall the cruel pain of announcing the death of his wife and—what will be even worse—of declining hospitality to his friend. They stand in suspense as Heracles, after the first greeting is over, exclaims in astonishment at the signs of mourning that Admetus is wearing. But as it quickly becomes evident that the King is evading the questions of his guest and does not intend to reveal to him the nature of the grief that has fallen on his home, their suspense is turned to wonder and carping. Heracles asks anxiously about children and parents and wife, even touching upon the far-famed vow of Alcestis to die for her

husband. But every question is successfully parried by the King; and the guest is at last prevailed upon to enter the house, believing that only some distant kinswoman is dead, for whom perfunctory mourning and formal rites are in progress. The sense of propriety in these conventional old men is roughly shaken: they cannot see that the magnitude of the King's sorrow has dwarfed the petty things of use and custom. Only great things remain—love and duty pre-eminent; and Admetus knows that his dear dead would not grudge this imperative present task. So, when the senators complain of his action, he gives them a simple answer:

> "*But had I driven him from my home and city*
> *Who came my guest, then hadst thou praised me more?*
> *Nay, sooth; for mine affliction so had grown*
> *No less, and more inhospitable I;*
> *And to my ills were added this beside,*
> *That this my home were called 'Guest-hating Hall.'*
> *Yea, and myself have proved him kindliest host*
> *Whene'er to Argos' thirsty plain I fared.*" [2]

But now there comes in sight a procession bearing burial gifts, headed by the old parents of the King. At their entrance there is an abrupt change of tone, a descent from the ideal standpoint, and a violent clash of character which make for acrid realism in the scene which follows. It is one of mutual recrimination between father and son, each blaming the other for the cowardice which the onlooker can perceive in both. As the procession halts before his door, Admetus drops to the dead level of existence from

the height of great emotion. He hates the formal troop of mourners: the gifts by which they seek to honour the peerless spirit of his wife: the trite phrases of consolation which are belied in the uttering by the hardness of voice and eye. He hates the very presence of his father, reminding him, as it does, that they both of them alike have cowered for safety under the sacrifice of a woman. And when, in the selfishness of an unlovely old age, Pheres praises the act of Alcestis because it leaves him the protection of his son, the wrath and shame in the heart of Admetus break out into unreasonable railing against his father.

The retort is obvious, and pointed with caustic truth: Pheres does not spare his son, and although there is fierce malignance in his speech, there is justice in it too.

> "*Shamelessly thou hast fought against thy death:*
> *Thy life is but transgression of thy doom,*
> *And murder of thy wife.*" [2]

The torrent of scorn that he pours upon Admetus, the merciless exposure of his timidity, the gibes at his base love of life, cannot but sweep away the moorings which held the King to his self-respect. But pride and anger struggle fiercely against humiliation; and the unseemly quarrel rages on, despite voices interposed in a vain effort at conciliation, until the funeral train emerges from the palace. Then father and son, shamed to silence, follow the body of Alcestis to its burial, while the Chorus chants:

"Alas for the loving and daring!
Farewell to the noblest and best!
May Hermes conduct thee down-faring
Kindly, and Hades to rest
Receive thee! If any atonement
For ills even there may betide
To the good, O thine be enthronement
By Hades' bride." [2]

Meantime Heracles, with mind at perfect ease concerning the fortunes of his host, had been feasting and making merry within the palace. Rooms apart had been assigned to him; precautions had been taken that he should not be disturbed by the sounds of mourning, and the servants had been warned not to betray to him what was passing. So in all good faith he had given himself up to jollity, scandalizing the man who waited on him until the honest fellow could bear it no longer, and flung himself sulkily out of the house. He is followed soon by Heracles himself, who cannot comprehend the reason for the servant's gloom and chides him good-humouredly. Why such excessive grief for a woman alien-born? he asks. Surely such sullen service is not worthy either of master or of guest.

At first the man is reticent, fearing to offend the King. But pressed by Heracles, he presently reveals that it is not a stranger who is dead, but the Queen herself; and that even now the funeral train is returning from the grave.

Heracles is overwhelmend with sorrow for his friend and contrition for his own untimely revelling. For a few

moments he stands heaping reproaches on himself, and on the servants for their silence; but he is not long inactive. The generosity of Admetus fires his own heart; and his thought leaps impetuously to an act of tremendous daring. He will face the power of Death himself, and wrest Alcestis from him. He puts rapid questions to the man concerning the place of burial, calls up every resource of energy and endurance, and nerves himself for his grim task by a determination to requite Admetus worthily.

As Heracles departs in search of Alcestis' tomb, the mourners are seen approaching, led by Admetus, alone. A profound change has come upon the King. His ignoble anger has vanished: no word more is heard of the petulant reproach of his parents: nothing of the old arrogant claim on life which had blinded his soul and hardened his heart. Humbled now, and remorseful, he sees that death were infinitely preferable to life at the price that he has paid. Something had given him sight as he stood beside Alcestis' tomb. He had tried to cast himself down to die beside her; but friends had restrained him, and now as he stands before the home that he dare not enter, he makes a pitiful confession—

> "*Friends, I account the fortune of my wife*
> *Happier than mine, albeit it seems not so.*
> *For nought of grief shall touch her any more,*
> *And glorious rest she finds from many toils.*
> *But I, unmeet to live, my doom outrun,*
> *Shall drag out bitter days: I know it now.*
> *How shall I bear to enter this my home?*" [2]

The bystanders try to persuade him to go in, but he lingers through the beautiful choral ode that is raised in praise of Alcestis. They sing of the worship and honour that will be paid at her tomb as at a shrine; and as the long hymn is drawing to a close, Heracles is seen to be returning, leading a woman closely veiled. The King, standing in quiet despair, utters no word of greeting to his guest, and the Chorus wait in silent wonder for an explanation. A strange awe falls upon them; and Heracles, beginning in gentle gravity to reproach the King for want of confidence in him, turns presently to the veiled figure at his side. Will the King take and guard this maid for him, until he shall return from Thrace? She is a prize awarded him for great toil, and Admetus will do well to care for her.

But the King recoils at the thought. How can he receive a young and beautiful woman into his house without pain to himself and shame to her? He protests that it is unthinkable, and begs Heracles to take her elsewhere. She would be a constant reminder of his grief, and an insult to the memory of his wife. Until this moment he has hardly glanced at the silent figure by the hero's side, except to notice that her rich vestments proclaim her young. But something in her appearance seizes his attention; and he proceeds, rapidly and in great agitation:

> "*But, woman, thou,*
> *Whoso thou art, know that thy body's stature*
> *Is as Alcestis, and thy form as hers.*
> *Ah me!—lead, for the Gods' sake, from my sight*

Euripides : Alcestis

This woman!—Take not my captivity captive.
For as I look on her, methinks I see
My wife. She stirs my heart with turmoil: fountains
Of tears burst from mine eyes. O wretched I!
Now taste I first this grief's full bitterness." [2]

It is Alcestis's very self, won back from death as Apollo had promised; but with the awful silence of the tomb still upon her. Heracles places her hand in that of the reluctant and incredulous King, while he draws aside her veil:

"*Yea, guard her. Thou shalt call*
The child of Zeus one day a noble guest.
Look on her, if in aught she seems to thee
Like to thy wife. Step forth from grief to bliss." [2]

[1] From *The Life and Death of Jason*, by William Morris (Longmans).
[2] From the *Alcestis* of Euripides, translated by Dr A. S. Way (Loeb Classical Library, Heinemann).

Euripides: Medea

ALTHOUGH both the *Alcestis* and the *Medea* are preoccupied with the theme of love, there is a vivid contrast in the treatment of the theme, despite certain resemblances between the two dramas. It is true that both of the heroines are pre-eminent in devotion to the men with whom they are mated; and that the hero in each case moves on a plane from which he cannot reach the height of his wife's spirit. But whilst on the one hand love takes possession of a gentle nature, and favoured by every circumstance of character and environment triumphs over death itself, in the case of Medea a wild soul spends itself recklessly for the object of its love, beats impotently against injustice, loses hold on sanity and sweet human ties, and is transformed into an avenging fury.

The story of Medea belongs to the old Argo legend, which was made into poetry by Apollonius Rhodius in the first century before Christ, and by our own Victorian poet Morris in *The Life and Death of Jason.*

Jason, the exiled heir to the throne of Iolchos, was reared by the centaur Chiron. Arrived at manhood, he determined to claim his right from his usurping uncle Pelias; and travelling to Iolchos on foot, he presented himself before the King minus a sandal. Now Pelias had been warned against a man who should come to him with

one foot bare; and, moreover, he had no intention of yielding up the throne to his nephew. He therefore cast about for some means of ridding himself of Jason, and hit upon the plan of sending him on a wild and dangerous quest—to seek and bring the Golden Fleece from the barbarous land of Colchis. Jason gladly undertook the task: gathered the Greek heroes together and sailed with them in the good ship *Argo*.

After a perilous voyage, the heroes arrived at Colchis, and Jason made known their quest to the King Æëtes. But they soon found that they had no hope of success. Æëtes was false to them, made impossible conditions, and plotted against their life. Disaster seemed imminent, when there came a deliverance so glorious that it seemed like the interposition of a god. It was the quick wit of a girl, prompted by love. Medea, the young daughter of Æëtes, had seen and loved the brave Greek prince whom her father now plotted to destroy. She was an ardent and impulsive creature; and she determined to save Jason. By the magic lore that she possessed, she secretly enabled him to overcome the fire-breathing oxen, and the earth-sown army that her father sent against him. Then, realizing too late that she had incurred the unpitying rage of her father, she fled at night from the palace, to take refuge with the Greek heroes.

Under cover of the darkness, she led Jason to the forest-precinct where the Fleece was hidden; and by her charms she lulled the sleepless dragon that guarded it. She even betrayed to him her brother Absyrtus, driven by the

danger of a horrible death for herself, her lover, and his comrades; and then, claiming from Jason a solemn oath of marriage when they should come to Hellas, she sailed with him on the *Argo*. Æëtes pursued them in fierce wrath; and the gods, offended for the murder of Absyrtus, vexed them with storms. But at length they came to the island of Circe; and she, for the sake of her kinship with Medea, purified them of the murder of Absyrtus and set them on their way again. At Phæacia, where they were driven for harbourage, Æëtes overtook them, threatening war with King Alcinous if he did not yield up his fugitive daughter. It was then that the great wise Queen Arete pleaded for Medea in gentle charity.

Alcinous yielded to his wife's entreaties on one condition—that Jason and Medea should be married forthwith; for then he could return answer to Æëtes that he would not separate husband and wife. Thus the two were hurriedly wedded; and sailed in safety from Phæacia, to encounter many a terrible adventure before they reached Iolchos at last, triumphing in the possession of the Fleece. They gained great glory from their enterprise, but little else. For Pelias would not yield the throne to Jason; and it seemed to Medea that all she had wrought had been in vain. She brooded over Jason's wrongs, chafing at the restraint imposed on her in her new life, and eager to strike for the kingship on his behalf. At last she evolved a plan by which she thought Pelias might be removed from their path, and the throne secured for Jason. Promising the old King renewed youth by

MEDEA AND ABSYRTUS

Herbert Draper

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means of her enchantments, she induced him to submit to death at the hands of his daughters. Then, in the storm of indignation which arose against her, she and Jason and their two young children fled to Corinth.

So the legend runs to the point where Euripides takes it up. In crude outline it is savage and incredible; and yet it contains all the elements which in the hands of idealistic poets have made a story of enthralling romantic beauty. In the *Medea*, however, the poet has avoided so far as might be both the barbarity of the legend and its potential charm. He has treated only the final catastrophe—the abandonment of Medea by Jason and her dreadful vengeance upon him. And although he could not escape from the data: although he is compelled to handle some of the most barbarous of them, he has translated them from terms of glimmering wonder and breathless excitement into the language of reality. He has brought Medea out of the region of myth, where she dwelt in eerie and tempestuous beauty, into the stream of human existence. The marvellous and the superhuman drop away, save for a fragment or two in the framework of the Drama; and Medea becomes simply a woman, struggling against her own wild heart and the injustice of her oppressors.

The Drama opens with the monologue of Medea's old nurse, from which we learn all that is vital to an understanding of the action. Jason has forsaken Medea and is about to marry with Glaucé, the young daughter of Creon, King of Corinth. Medea is sick with misery and

is lying in the house prostrate on her bed. Two things the old woman makes quite clear, as she stands talking outside: that the chief cause of Medea's grief is shame at her betrayal; and that already the storm of passion is tending toward madness. When an attendant comes in, bringing Jason's children back from their play, there is a clear hint of the catastrophe. The man tells of a rumour that he has heard: Creon has ordered the banishment of their mistress and her boys. The nurse breaks into a wail of commiseration, and then clearly states her fear for the effect of this new wrong upon Medea's mind. She sends the little ones in before she speaks the dread she has that their mother may lift her hand against their lives; and almost immediately afterward the frenzied voice of Medea is heard, calling bitter curses upon her unfathered children.

There gather gradually the ladies of Corinth who form the Chorus. They are deeply sympathetic; and they give pitying answers to the nurse's tale; while within the house, at intervals, Medea's voice is heard, wailing her grief and anger, and the old remorse that has reawakened for her brother's death.

The scene is one of weird impressiveness. So far, Medea has not appeared; but her cries within the house, the appearance of her children, the indignant fidelity of the old servants, the beautiful lyrics of the Chorus, and, above all, the knowledge we possess that another blow is about to fall on her, produce a cumulative effect which makes the moment of her entrance intensely dramatic.

Yet she begins her speech quietly, almost in apology for her former unrestraint. She strives for self-control while she puts her case before the Corinthian women and begs their help. For a moment or two she succeeds, pathetically acknowledging her foreign birth and the flaw it intrudes in the legality of her marriage. But at this thought, emotion sweeps over her again:

> "*. . . I dazzle where I stand,*
> *The cup of all life shattered in my hand,*
> *Longing to die—O friends! He, even he,*
> *Whom to know well was all the world to me,*
> *The man I loved, hath proved most evil.*" [1]

She pours out her heart to the listeners; and it is not a mere selfish recital of her own sorrow. The brain that had been clear and quick to save her lover in the extremity of danger has not lost its power. She sees the base act of Jasón in its broad aspect, as a wrong to womankind; and she rises from the contemplation of her personal suffering to the thought that this, after all, is but one of the many evils that subjection brings upon women. But the greatest evil—the helpless creature goaded to crime by injustice—is present to her at this moment only as a blind craving for revenge. It will seize and carry her on to its culmination as the sweetest thing that life now holds; but it will finally reveal itself, since she cannot but face the truth, as the last and deepest wrong, that has cancelled her humanity. The light of that thought has not yet dawned; and will not until the storm of passion has

wrought sheer havoc. All her fervent nature is possessed by the idea of vengeance; and seeing that her friends pity and sympathize, she pledges them not to betray her. Their willing promise is only just in time, for they are interrupted by the arrival of the King, guarded by armed attendants whose very presence is a menace. Creon is old, and has grown hard and tyrannous with age. He has long desired a great match for his only daughter, hoping to see his line established on the throne of Corinth before his death. To him the marriage with the Argonaut hero is not only a prudent step, likely to bring him reflected glory; but a thing perfectly right in itself, because perfectly legal. By the letter of the law, which forbade a Greek to marry a 'barbarian,' Medea was not Jason's wife; and the letter of the law merely was of concern to Creon. To him Medea was an uncivilized creature from outland parts: a being without rights, who might safely be ignored; and having won over Jason, the match was arranged and the preliminary formalities concluded. Not until a rumour reached him that Medea in her wrath had solemnly cursed his child and him, did any thought of her disturb him. Then, fearing that she might indeed do his daughter some injury, or at the least might move public opinion in her favour, he determined upon instant banishment for her and her two young sons. Without a word to soften or explain his action, he stands before Medea now, and curtly orders her to prepare for departure.

The blow is so crushing that for a moment Medea

seems to sink under it; she can think of nothing but to ask what crime of hers has merited this punishment. But when Creon cynically replies that there has been no crime, and that the measure is one of precaution merely, to guard himself against her reputation for magic-lore, she rallies her wit and meets him on his own ground. Half ironically, she repudiates the damning possession of brains, and bids him set his mind at rest.

Creon sees that she is trying to placate him, and harshly repeats his decree. He even threatens her, when she continues her entreaties, with force from his soldiery; and Medea, shrinking in horror from the thought of personal violence, instantly ceases her petition. She pretends to yield; and in feigned humility, begs on her knees for one day's respite. Creon, partly deceived, and entirely convinced that she can do no harm in so short a time, reluctantly consents. But he has hardly gone when Medea breaks into a torrent of speech which, in its fierce exultation over Creon, its wild leap to the height of daring and its rallying cry to her own spirit, comes very near to madness. All the shapeless thoughts of vengeance on which she had brooded spring into vivid life as she rapidly cons now this plot, now that, to reach her end. Of the end itself there can be no doubt; she must kill these three—the King, and Jason and his bride—in the few hours left to her. And for this she will need every resource of strategy and courage.

No wonder that the Chorus sing, as she rushes into the house, of a strange reversal of all the order of nature; of

woman made terrible because man has forgotten God. They take up the story of Medea's broken life: of the wonder and the pity of it: of her distant home: of her surpassing love for Jason, and of her betrayal. In the beauty and grace of the songs the emotional strain is lightened: but they have a further purpose. For while they tell the old story over in tender phrases, Jason himself enters, and Medea again comes out of the house. The two stand face to face at last and the crux of the drama is reached. Jason is the first to speak; and one feels all the spirit of the man in his opening words—cold, ambitious, prudent, with ideals faded and every generous emotion dead. He protests that he has acted from motives of policy and considerations of their best interest: for the welfare of Medea and their children as well as for himself. The new marriage was the only way, in a land to which they were strangers, to secure a home for them all, and princely connexions for his sons. But Medea has spoiled everything by her ungovernable anger: and he has come, since nothing else is possible now, to make provision for the children in their exile.

The speech is clear, terse, moderate in tone, and pitilessly logical from Jason's point of view. From that point, too, it is not unkind: he wishes to do what may be done to soften their lot. But to the woman who loves him his words are a mere blur of sound, the logic meaningless, the untroubled manner a thing of contempt. In tone and look and gesture one fact is certain—that her husband has ceased to love her, and is content to cast her

off. It has clamoured in her ears while he spoke, drowning every other sound; and when she replies it is that which prompts her. It inspires her great indictment—the case for the woman against injustice throughout all time—and it evokes a shuddering recoil from baseness which she feels to be literally a pollution.

Jason's anger is stung by her denunciation, but his purpose is quite unmoved. He flings a veiled insult at her love; and as he elaborates the reasons for his action, with no little skill and plausibility, we feel that with every word the conflict becomes more deadly. In apparent good faith, but with intolerable effrontery to the injured woman, he claims to have repaid that old debt, if indeed it were a debt. He has given her a home in an ordered country and her name has been linked in the glory of his. As to the marriage with Glaucé—with a sneer at the bare idea of sentiment—the affair is a bargain, with consideration given and received on each side. Let Medea look at the matter for one instant with the eyes of reason, and she herself will acknowledge that he has acted wisely.

But the very root of the tragedy lay there. Medea could no more detach herself from the emotion that possessed her than Jason could revive the tenderness that filled him when he lifted the sweet wild fugitive on board the *Argo*. So they stand, typifying the eternal struggle between the passionate heart and the arrogant brain; and striking at each other in baffled rage across the gulf between them. Jason makes one last offer of help, but it is vehemently refused, and with a final thrust at Medea's

savagery, he leaves her. When he has gone, the inevitable reaction comes. The Chorus, interpreting her mood, sing musingly of the pains of exile, and of her lonely state. She realizes that she has flung away her only chance of help, and she sees herself in a few hours expelled from Corinth without one friend to shelter her. Despair is settling upon her when a curious incident occurs, suddenly reviving hope and making the path clear for her revenge. It is the arrival of Ægeus, King of Athens. He is travelling back from Apollo's shrine at Delphi, where he has been to renew an old petition that the god would give him children. Medea, thinking rapidly, questions him of his errand. She sees a possibility of succour; and putting all her wrongs before him, she begs him to give her refuge at Athens. He shall not fail of a reward, for she has magic arts which will secure to him his long desire for children. Ægeus is indignant at her wrongs, and promises to succour her if she comes to him; but knowing what she is about to do, she cunningly extorts an oath from him. He gives it willingly, and as he departs Medea breaks into a cry of exultation:

> "*God, and God's Justice, and ye blinding Skies,*
> *At last the victory dawneth!*" [1]

Quickly she lays her plan. She will recall Jason, feign repentance, and send the children to the bride with gifts —marvellous raiment and jewels which will hide under their beauty an agonizing death for Glaucé. But that done—she pauses in horror, the sweetness of revenge

dashed by the thought of what must follow. Then, she must lift her hand to slay her children, before they can be caught and killed for their mother's crime. There is a short altercation with the friendly women about her, who make a futile effort to restrain her. But brushing aside their remonstrance, she sends the nurse for Jason, and in a scene which vibrates with dramatic power, she pretends to make peace with him, and puts the frightful revenge in motion. Jason, completely deceived, promises that the children shall be taken to Glaucé, to present their gifts and beg for leave to stay in Corinth. But twice, as the little ones stand waiting, the motherhood in Medea rebels against the fury that is driving her. Tears that she cannot check rush into her eyes, and she almost forgets her *rôle*, as she clasps them to her.

And again when Jason, softened by her submission, is promising to lead them up to an honoured manhood, a sudden movement of Medea arrests him. He cannot understand her grief, and the strangeness of her manner; and asks her if she doubts that he will act in good faith toward their children.

But the gentler mood passes, and when Jason, with characteristic canniness, counsels her not to send such precious gifts to his bride, the spirit of vengeance has regained possession of her soul. She overrules him, and Jason leads the children to the Princess, carrying in their innocent hands the weapon that will slay her. Not until they are gone does Medea realize fully what the next step must be; and the realization brings agony. She waits for

their return in a storm of emotion: suspense that almost stops the beating of her heart: hideous hope that her plot has succeeded and that Glaucé even now is dying from the poison; and ghastly fear that her children have been taken for the deed. But when they return at last, in unconscious gladness that the great lady has been kind to them, it is something more awful still that robs their mother of power of utterance.

A poignant scene follows in which every instinct of her nature struggles against her wrath. Their sweet young faces stir the tenderness that has hitherto been bound within her; and as it floods her heart it seems for a few moments to sweep away her evil purpose. But it only returns in added strength, and as her soul writhes in the conflict, reason totters, and she implores the vengeance within, as a living and implacable foe, to spare her babes. Backward and forward she sways, driven by hatred and love, until the scale is turned at last by the thought of her own irrevocable act. Glaucé, even at this moment, is dying from the poison that she has sent.

"Too late, too late!
By all Hell's living agonies of hate,
They shall not take my little ones alive
To make their mock with! Howso'er I strive
The thing is doomed. . . .
Oh, darling hand! Oh, darling mouth, and eye,
And royal mien, and bright brave faces clear,
May you be blessèd, but not here! What here
Was yours, your father stole. . . .

. . . I am broken by the wings
Of evil. . . . Yea, I know to what bad things
I go, but louder than all thought doth cry
Anger, which maketh man's worst misery." [1]

But even yet she cannot strike: one thing more is needed to nerve her hand, and it comes only too soon. A messenger is seen flying toward them from the palace in frantic haste. As he comes within hail, he shouts to Medea to flee—both Creon and the Princess lie dead from the effects of her poisoned gift, and she has not a moment to lose. Her own life will surely be demanded for the crime. Medea remains immovable, smiling in awful joy at the news. She makes the man relate every detail of the ghastly scene in the palace; and for just so long as the story takes to tell, she clasps revenge complete and satisfying. But a moment later the thing has shrivelled in her hand; for there is now no hope to save her children.

"Oh, up, and get thine armour on,
My heart! . . .
Take up thy sword, O poor right hand of mine,
Thy sword: then onward to the thin-drawn line
Where life turns agony." [1]

She goes into the house; and a moment later the shrieks of the children are heard. They have hardly ceased when Jason rushes in, bent on carrying off his sons before the king's avengers can capture them. A woman warns him of what is passing within; and as the agonized father bursts open the door of the house, Medea appears on the

roof, in the dragon-chariot of the Sun, with the poor dead bodies lying at her feet. There is something weird in this touch of the supernatural; but there is something symbolic too. For Medea is a woman no longer: with her own hand, driven by foul wrong and an untamed heart, she has cast humanity away.

We need not follow to the end the last clash of the two bitter spirits. Jason pleads piteously for one poor boon: "Give me the dead to weep and make their grave." But the fury that has smitten him is inexorable.

> "*Never! Myself will lay them in a still*
> *Green sepulchre. . . .*
> *. . . For thee, behold, death draweth on,*
> *Evil and lonely, like thine heart: the hands*
> *Of thine own* Argo, *rotting where she stands,*
> *Shall smite thine head in twain, and bitter be*
> *To the last end thy memories of me.*" [1]

[1] From Professor Gilbert Murray's translation of the *Medea* (George Allen and Unwin, Ltd.).

Euripides: Phædra

THE *Hippolytus* of Euripides, to which we turn for the story of Phædra, is frequently called the earliest love-tragedy in European literature. That is to say, it is the first to deal fully and frankly with the power of love toward tragic issues. This can hardly be said about the *Medea*, for that drama is only the last incident of a story wherein love has been changed to hatred; and the motive is revenge. But in the *Hippolytus* the story is unfolded from its inception; and Phædra's passion is found to be the force that moves the whole action of the tragedy. This fact has a peculiar attraction for the modern mind; but the drama has other claims upon us too. First, for its sheer beauty, as poetry and as dramatic art of a special type; then, for its accurate study of character, three people at least gripping our interest as complete and convincing human creatures; and again, for its lofty tone and a reflective element which, though characteristically original, is calm and clear. But the most wonderful fact of all is the surprising contrast between the nature of the theme and the austere beauty of the drama which has been built upon it.

The crude facts of the story are almost repulsive on the face of them. Phædra, the young wife of Theseus, King of Athens and Trozen, had fallen in love with her husband's illegitimate son Hippolytus. That is the initial

situation; and the further data of the old Attic legend do not soften it. For we know that Phædra's love was unrequited, a fact which, with curious unreason, seems to accuse her; and we know too that when her love was betrayed to Hippolytus she took her own life in shame and fear, first making a false charge against him which she knew would bring upon him the punishment of death.

Such, in harsh outline, is the story of unhappy love and wild impulse which has been made by this poet, who was before all things a seeker of truth, into a work of supreme spiritual beauty. More wonderful still, Phædra, who by conventional canons would seem to have forfeited all claim to respect or sympathy, is found to be a woman of sweet and gentle purity, cruelly betrayed by forces without and within, and driven by desperation to a frantic attempt to save her honour.

The means to such an end are interesting, although behind them all lies the explanation of them all—the poet's higher and broader perception of truth. He has seen the passion which ruled Phædra as a great world-force, an elemental power which could neither be escaped nor overcome. This power is personified as Aphrodite or Cypris, goddess of love; and she is conceived as the mortal enemy of Hippolytus, because he has scorned her in his spiritual pride and refused her her meed of worship.

The key to the tragedy lies in this conception of Cypris, and in the mystical, ascetic spirit of Hippolytus against which she has set her offended godhead. They represent

eternally opposing forces, and warfare between them is inevitable and deadly. For that reason, the opening monologue of the Drama is of great importance. The scene is placed before the castle of Theseus at Trozen. A statue of a goddess stands on either side—that of Artemis, chaste Moon-goddess, on the one hand, decked with flowers and carefully tended; and on the other hand, bare and unhonoured, is the statue of Aphrodite. While beside the latter, musing in evident anger, is the gleaming form of the goddess herself. We learn the cause of her anger as she speaks. She is grieved on account of Hippolytus, who in his excessive devotion to Artemis, despises Aphrodite and looks upon love as a thing unclean. His arrogance and neglect are an unbearable insult, and she has determined to punish him, swiftly and without mercy. She has already prepared the pitfall, long ago in Athens, when Hippolytus came to be solemnly initiated into the Mysteries.

> "*And Phædra there, his father's Queen high-born,*
> *Saw him, and, as she saw, her heart was torn*
> *With great love, by the working of my will.*
> *And for his sake, long since, on Pallas' hill,*
> *Deep in the rock, that love no more might roam,*
> *She built a shrine, and named it Love-at-home:*
> *And the rock held it, but its face alway*
> *Seeks Trozên o'er the seas.*" [1]

Thus Phædra tried to exorcise her passion; but there came a time when Theseus, to expiate some sin, retired to Trozen with his Queen. There, meeting the young Prince

daily, love re-awakened; and at the opening of the tragedy it is secretly consuming her very life.

Now Aphrodite's hour has come, and Phædra is the weapon with which she will strike. The young Queen's vigilant honour, proud and enduring, shall be overthrown, by a broken word uttered in weakness; and she shall die, dragging down Hippolytus with her. Even while the goddess is invoking the Prince's doom, there are cheery distant sounds of the returning hunt; and the voice of Hippolytus raised above the rest in a hymn to Artemis. Aphrodite lingers an instant longer, and the menace of her final words shatters the blithe harmony that is approaching:

> "*Little he knows that Hell's gates opened are,*
> *And this his last look on the great Day-star!*" [1]

The next moment the goddess has vanished, and Hippolytus leads in his troop of huntsmen, laden with spoil and bearing fresh-culled field flowers for the honour of the goddess of all wild things. Straight to the statue of Artemis goes the Prince, and standing in an attitude of supplication, he proffers a wreath from the uncropped meadows that she loves. There is in his prayer a curious note of exaltation. Young, brave, and fair, there is something at once beautiful and sinister in his claim to perfect purity; his naïve assumption that he alone of all men is worthy to worship the goddess; in the ascetic vow he takes; and the mystical touches, hinting of personal converse with the deity. We vaguely feel that there is a shade of excess in it; that the limit of holy confidence has been

passed; and that, with all its intensity, there is something narrow and hard in his devotion. A pious old huntsman has to remind him that he has not paid service at the second shrine; when, with a perfunctory salute to the statue of Aphrodite, Hippolytus and his train go into the castle.

There follows a lovely ode by the Chorus, which prepares for the entrance of Phædra. They tell of a mysterious sickness that has fallen on the Queen, and of their fears for her life.

Many a surmise they ponder, to account for the strange malady: perhaps some god is angry with the Queen for stinted rites: or the absent King her husband is unfaithful: or she has had ill-tidings from her Cretan home. Their musing brings no light to the problem; but its purpose is served, for when Phædra is presently borne out on her couch we are prepared to see a being in whom vitality is burning low; but in whom suffering is overshone by stainless honour and an unconquerable will. She is attended by her maids, and by an old nurse whose delineation is wonderful. She is one of the humble characters whom Euripides drew so often: whose sterling qualities he seems to delight in, but whose limitation and error he puts in too, with absolute fidelity. Like Medea's nurse, she probably came with her mistress from her maiden home; and she has grown old in faithful service. She has the tenderness of a mother for the young Queen; but age has made her fretful, and slavery has hardened the fibre of her mind. With pathetic solicitude, she is yet inclined to

be querulous at the feverish caprices of her charge. Moreover, she divines that there is something weighing upon her mistress which Phædra will not reveal, even to her; and she is hurt at the lack of confidence.

As the Queen's languid voice follows the wandering thought that has almost escaped control, the old woman grows impatient. She cannot comprehend the yearning flight of fancy which, in phrases of wild beauty, betrays its longing for escape: to flee to the mountain spaces and the woods and fields, and thread the mazes of the pines with arrow and spear, like Artemis herself.

There is a significance in the half-conscious utterances which lies very near the surface of the words: the fair soul unwittingly hinting its secret in delirium as lovely as itself. Presently her mind grows clear again, and she starts in fear of what she may have betrayed.

The sight of her anguish and humiliation stings the nurse to another protest. She had not possessed the clue to Phædra's raving, and the sudden access of shame is inexplicable. She longs to soothe and help, out of her deep and genuine affection; and she has also some touch of quite human curiosity which she cannot restrain. But every way she is baffled by the silence of the Queen. She feels that she is slighted, but much more she feels the cruelty of unsuccoured pain to one whom she dearly loves.

The thought that Phædra is surely dying from this mysterious malady flings her down in supplication; and she pours out a torrent of entreaties until we feel that the Queen is growing exhausted by them. But there is no

sign given until the nurse, reminding her mistress of the children whom she will leave unprotected by her death, speaks of Theseus' bastard son who may disinherit them, and lets fall his name, Hippolytus. The word brings a cry from Phædra at last; and then, reluctantly, in slow and broken phrases, all the secret is wrung from her.

The old woman now is horrified and remorseful at her own persistence. Terror seizes her, and an unreasoning sense that her mistress must perforce yield to dishonour. Phædra's chastity rises indignantly at so base a thought, giving her strength to face the women about her with a magnificent defence of her honour. She begins almost hesitatingly, on a note of sadness for all the sum of human misery; but she gathers courage as the story is unfolded and rises to sublimity at last.

But while the Queen is speaking, winning a painful way upward to her spirit's height, the nurse is lagging after her on a much lower path. She has rallied from the first shock, when Phædra's confession had driven her to mere panic; and is now revolving the matter in a mind where perception has been dimmed by age and the moral fibre coarsened by long servility. Calling up all her store of doubtful experience and worldly wisdom, she opposes every cunning and plausible argument to Phædra's virtue. Can her mistress not see that she is visibly caught in the snare of Cypris? Of what use is it to struggle against so mighty a goddess? No human heart can resist the power of love; and it is wiser to yield at once than to be broken by Aphrodite's anger.

Phædra listens patiently, seeing that the faithful old creature is prompted by real devotion; and her reply has more of pity than of anger in it, for the crooked counsel.

But when the nurse, irritated, flings a rank word at this love that she cannot comprehend, Phædra's anger blazes in a vehement rebuke.

The old woman is not silenced, however: she merely changes her tactics. Will not the Queen trust to her? She knows of love-philtres and salves that will cure her passion without fear of shame. Phædra is growing weary of the contest; and at last, when endurance is strained to breaking, she yields on a point which seems quite innocent and harmless. The nurse may fetch the potion of which she speaks; only—and on this she lays pathetic stress—no word of her secret must be breathed to the Prince. There is a soothing, half evasive reply from the nurse: a muttered prayer aside to Cypris which has something ominous in it; and the old servant goes out to wreck the honour of her mistress in a foolish attempt to serve her. Hardly has she gone when, above the song which the women of the Chorus have taken up, Phædra catches the deep tones of an angry voice within the palace. She springs to her feet, every nerve tingling with apprehension; and calling to the singers for silence she bends her ear to the great door A cry escapes her.

It is the voice of Hippolytus which she can hear, raging at her nurse in immeasurable scorn, for something that has been asked of him. As each brutal epithet falls, Phædra, in a trance of horror and shame repeats it to the listening

women. Then she shrinks aside, as Hippolytus bursts out of the castle, the nurse at his heels, frantically entreating him to hold his peace. By no direct word does he acknowledge Phædra's presence; and she, with every shred of self-respect gone, cowers apart as though she were indeed guilty of the foulness he imputes to her. But in noisy indignation, with every word barbed for the trembling Queen, he raves against the nurse, against the whole of womankind, and love and marriage, ending by a threat to reveal the story to Theseus upon his return. His anger is just; but in the hardness of youth and the bitterness of a narrow spirit it is savage, merciless, and all too prompt. Blind to everything but his own wounded pride, he cannot see that Phædra has been cruelly betrayed by the meddling zeal of her servant; and he heaps insult upon her until her sensitive soul lies prostrate—a thing that seems even to herself as black as he believes it. All through the tirade she, who is the central figure in this extraordinary scene, takes no part in it: she remains mute, as though literally smitten dumb with shame, until Hippolytus rushes out. Then she sinks to the ground, sobbing.

Some of the women try to comfort her, and raising her eyes as they speak, she catches sight of the figure of the nurse. She springs from the ground, a wave of anger sweeping away her weakness.

The old woman is deeply contrite for the wrong that she has done; but garrulous and plausible to the last, she pleads her love as an excuse, and claims that had her plan succeeded she would have been praised for what she now is

blamed. Phædra's wrath abates a little after its first uncontrolled outburst: she cannot long be angry with one so old and lowly; and besides, there are other, darker things to be thought about and done. But when the nurse, deceived by her calmness, tries to broach some other scheme, the Queen dismisses her peremptorily. She will henceforth guide her own affairs, she says; and we know she means that there remains only one thing for her to do.

The old woman goes sorrowfully away, and Phædra is left to face the thought of her intolerable humiliation, of the threatened exposure to her husband, and of the stain upon her children. As reflection brings back the assurance that she is innocent, despite all, it does but increase her anguish at the thought of dishonour, and stir her to frenzy against Hippolytus. She is resolved to die: that she sees to be inevitable now. But how save her fair name, and the honour of her young children, and the fame of her dear old Cretan home? How secure to herself, in spite of false appearances, the innocence that is hers by virtue of every act and thought of her life? Beating backward and forward in the narrow circle of shame and fear, the poor baffled mind can only see one path, crooked and dark, to the thing she craves for. It is the way of a lie—a false charge against Hippolytus. It will mean the death of a good man: that she knows—and rejoices in—so completely are truth and justice shrivelled in the monstrous injustice that she is suffering.

She goes in, and the Chorus break into a song of fore-

boding. A few minutes later there are cries of alarm within the castle, the sound of hurrying feet and voices calling to come and help the Queen. Then there are ejaculations of pity: a sudden, ominous silence, and again another voice—"Let it lie straight." Phædra is dead by her own hand.

We must pass quickly over the fate of Hippolytus, though that is really the crisis of the tragedy. Hardly had the poor body of Phædra been composed upon a bier than Theseus himself was announced, returning garlanded and joyful from a visit to the oracle of some god. Met by the news of his wife's death, he tore off all the signs of joy that he was wearing and threw himself beside her in bitter lamentation. A little tablet hanging from her wrist caught his eye, and believing it to be some dying wish, he gently disengaged it. It was the false charge against Hippolytus; and as the King read, his brow darkened with terrible anger. The pitiful figure before him seemed to claim swift and terrible vengeance; and Theseus uttered an awful curse against his son. Calling upon the god Poseidon to ratify an ancient promise, he demanded instant death for Hippolytus. The petition was uttered rashly, in anger and grief; and Theseus himself hardly dreamed that it would be fulfilled; but the answer came with dreadful promptitude. There was one stormy scene between father and son; and Hippolytus, pleading in vain for mercy, went out to banishment. But Poseidon in his far sea-caves had heard Theseus' invocation; and as the

young Prince urged his chariot along the shore, a mighty wave, crested by a fierce sea-monster, rolled destruction on him. Hurled from his chariot, and dragged at the heels of the maddened horses, Hippolytus was barely saved alive by his attendants. They carried him back to the castle, and brought him into the presence of the King, wounded and dying. But before life closed for him he was gloriously vindicated, and the tragedy ends, as it began, with the appearance of a goddess. It is not Aphrodite now, however. She has done her worst with the two young lives she has chosen to despoil; and now Artemis will justify their innocence and leave their memory clean and sweet.

[1] From Professor Gilbert Murray's translation of the *Hippolytus* (George Allen and Unwin, Ltd.).

Euripides: Iphigenia

WE turn back to the Trojan legend now, and to two Euripidean plays which in some sense round off the Orestean story. We had to leave that story at a ragged edge—the murder of Clytemnestra by her son Orestes in revenge for the death of Agamemnon. We could not go on to the third drama of the Æschylean trilogy, to follow the unhappy youth as he fled in remorse to the oracle of Apollo at Delphi, and thence to Athens, seeking to appease his mother's Furies. But if we had done so we should have found the whole theme brought to a calm and beautiful conclusion: Orestes cleansed by suffering and set free from guilt by Athena; and the avenging Furies changed into Spirits of Mercy.

Euripides, however, who took so many subjects for his drama from the Trojan cycle and always gave them new significance, in this case chose variants of the legend and wove them into a story which was entirely fresh. So that the *Iphigenia in Tauris*, with which we are chiefly concerned now, shows Orestes still fleeing before the Erinnyes; and carries the tale to another and much more exciting conclusion. Indeed, the peculiar charm of this tragedy is that it is not really tragedy at all, but a thrilling adventure-play. It reminds us of the *Odyssey*, with its flavour of the sea, the wistful note that haunts it and its

spice of physical peril; only, this is the work of a poet who adds high dramatic values to the delight of the story, with a lyric note of enchanting beauty, and penetrating thought.

Characteristically, when Euripides took up this part of the Orestean legend, it was not so much the man Orestes in whom he was interested, as the woman Iphigenia; with the result that we have two dramas called by her name and in which she is the protagonist. Both were produced late in the poet's life, the *Iphigenia in Aulis* being probably his last work. It contains the earlier part of the heroine's story—the sacrifice of the virgin-martyr at Aulis; and the great new feature of it, her rescue by Artemis just as the knife was falling to her throat, was perhaps the poet's own invention. There is no hint of it in Æschylus. To Clytemnestra, the murder of her first-born child Iphigenia was the crime which turned her life to bitterness and armed her against Agamemnon. He had beguiled her to send the child—for she was but a mere girl—to Aulis, for marriage with the splendid young hero Achilles. And then, at the bidding of a soothsayer, he had ruthlessly slain his daughter on the altar of Artemis; and sailed away to Troy.

Those are the facts at the heart of the mystery which is Clytemnestra; but when we come to the *Iphigenia in Aulis* we find some different data and a far different interpretation. Agamemnon there is almost pitiably human, driven by complex motives first to consent to Iphigenia's death, then to recant in horror, and finally to yield to

forces which he could not control. Iphigenia, too, is made at once nobler and more tragic in the idea of a willing sacrifice—giving herself up, after the first shock of terror, to die freely for her country's good. And in her rescue by the goddess there is added an element of marvel and mystery, which is at the same time a protest against a form of religion so inhuman.

The *Iphigenia in Tauris* opens at a period many years later. Troy had fallen. Agamemnon and Clytemnestra were both dead in the manner we know of; and Orestes was a fugitive, seeking through many lands to expiate the crime of mother-murder. There had been laid upon him at last, as the only means to peace, the command of Apollo to make his way to the savage land of the Tauri. He was to seize and bring from the temple of Artemis there a certain statue of the goddess which had fallen from heaven long before, and which the people of the land were dishonouring by human sacrifice. Every stranger cast upon their shores was slain at the shrine of the goddess; and Orestes ran the risk of almost certain death in making the venture. But he had a solemn promise from Apollo; and the reward would be sweet indeed. He would be cleansed of the crime, and set free from these haunting shapes of remorse which sometimes drove him to madness. Moreover, he would rid the name of Hellas from the stain which lay on its religion through the barbarous practices of the Tauri. So he and his devoted comrade Pylades sailed for those inhospitable waters.

But Destiny was guiding them to something stranger

than they had either hoped or dreaded. For this wild land, fiercely guarded from approach by the Rocky Gateway of the Symplêgades, was the country to which Artemis had carried Iphigenia from the altar in Aulis. And in the temple where they must seek the sacred statue, the daughter of Agamemnon was even now a priestess.

The years had passed wearily since Iphigenia first found herself a captive in Tauris. Completely shut off from the world by the sea which foamed round that desolate coast, no word ever came to her from her home in Argos; and she could make no sign to the friends who believed her dead long since. She hated this savage people, and Thoas their king, and the hideous sacrifices at which she had to perform the cleansing rite. Sometimes she would grow sick at their brutality, and wild with loneliness and longing to escape. Then sceptical thoughts would come about the deity who would accept such worship; and it would seem to her better to have died at Aulis than to have been saved for such slow misery. At other times she would brood over her short sweet girlhood and its bitter ending, gone irrevocably from the moment of her father's fraud; and bitterness would overwhelm her against Agamemnon, and the seer who counselled him, and the chieftains who persuaded him; but, above all, against Helen, for whose sake the war was made.

So youth stole away, taking with it, as Iphigenia sadly thought, all the high things that inspire a fair young soul—the shining ideal, the simple and ardent faith, the generous emotion that leaps to sympathy and service. And at the

moment of the opening of the play, when the ship that bears Orestes is being run ashore at Tauris, Iphigenia stands before her temple feeling hard and hopeless, dispossessed of all that is dear in life, and with every illusion long since fled.

It is early morning, and Iphigenia has just emerged from the temple. There are a few lines of formal exposition: an involuntary cry of disgust at the blood-stained altar that is insulting the eye of day; and then a flow of troubled speech.

> *"Ah me!*
> *But what dark dreams, thou clear and morning sky*
> *I have to tell thee, can that bring them ease!"* [1]

In the night that has just passed, she had dreamed of her home in Argos. She seemed to lie asleep there, with her maids around her, when suddenly an earthquake shook the palace; and running out of doors, she saw the great building reel and fall. Only one pillar remained; and as she watched it, she saw that brown hair waved about its head, and she heard it speak with a human voice. Then, in the strange confusion of dreams, she found herself fulfilling the office that she bears here in Tauris; and she washed the pillar clean for death, as it was her duty to wash the victims for the sacrifice.

With pathetic readiness, Iphigenia has accepted the dream as an evil omen. The pillar of her father's house must mean his son Orestes, whom she left a child in Argos all those years ago. Those whom she cleanses

are doomed to die. What can the dream mean, therefore, save that her brother is dead? The conviction is so strong upon her that she at once decides to prepare the funeral rite.

But hardly has she gone upon her errand when there is a sound of muffled voices approaching, and two youths enter, treading cautiously, and peering for danger on every side. They are Orestes and his friend Pylades, who have found their way up from the shore, and are searching for some means to carry out the god's command. As they come before the temple, and note the grim signs of slain men on the altar and hanging from the roof, they realize that this is the very centre of their quest; and that they have now to face the most deadly peril of all.

At this crucial moment, however, when all their hopes depend on a calm nerve and rapid thought and resolute action, an approaching fit of madness begins to shake Orestes. With strength sapped and courage broken, he falls upon a seat while Pylades goes to reconnoitre. In his weakened state he is overcome by the terror of the place and their enormous danger; and when his friend returns, he implores him to fly back to the galley. But Pylades has hopeful tidings. He has found a spot in this almost impregnable temple where an entry might be forced by courage and daring; and heartening Orestes with the news, he leads him away, to hide till nightfall in a cavern by the seashore.

As they go out of sight, the Chorus enters, singing a hymn to Artemis, the mountain-born child of Leto. They

are Greek women, captured in war by Thoas and given by him to the priestess for her handmaidens. They come wonderingly, in answer to Iphigenia's urgent summons; and are amazed when she appears with every sign of grief, followed by attendants who carry libations for the dead. In answer to a question from their leader, the priestess tells them of her ominous dream and of the funeral rite that she is about to perform for her brother.

From each attendant she takes in turn a golden goblet containing a libation of wine and milk and honey; and as she pours them into the altar for the dead, she and her women alternately chant a threnody for Orestes. They sing of the old dark story of Agamemnon's house, from its beginning in the sin of Pelops down to what was for Iphigenia its last and worst enormity, the sacrifice at Aulis. And as their voices rise and fall in the long ceremonial, while Iphigenia is still upon her knees before the altar, there is a violent interruption. A herdsman bursts eagerly upon them, with news that shatters the mournful beauty of their rite.

> "*A ship hath passed the blue Symplêgades,*
> *And here upon our coast two men are thrown,*
> *Young, bold, good slaughter for the altar-stone*
> *Of Artemis!*" [1]

The priestess rises, impatient at this sudden recall to her hated duty, and the jarring note that has broken their obsequies. The man and his ugly zeal are a complete offence to her, and she answers him curtly. Who and

what are these men he speaks of? At his reply, however, annoyance gives place to astonishment, curiosity, and a strange mingling of joy and pain. For he tells that the men are Greeks; and never yet, in all the dreary time of her captivity, has one of her countrymen landed upon these shores.

Once or twice, in her darkest hours, she had longed and prayed for such a day as this—for fate to send some Hellenic victim to her altar. She had thought she would be glad: that it would be a keen and satisfying pleasure to take a Greek life for all that the Greeks had made her suffer. But now that she stands face to face with her desire, there is a tumult of emotion within her in which bitterness hardly shares.

She questions the herdsman closely of the name and appearance of the strangers. One is called Pylades, he says; but the other's name he did not catch. And at Iphigenia's command, he goes over the whole story of their capture. He and his companions were washing their cattle in the sea, when one of them had spied two strangers sitting on the beach in a little bay. They were young, handsome, and apparently noble; and there was something in their fine physique and sudden unaccountable appearance in that lonely spot which made one of his fellows cry out that they were gods. But another jeered and said most likely they were shipwrecked sailors who knew the custom of the country and were trying to escape it; and just at that moment a strange thing happened. One of the youths was suddenly seized with a fit of

madness. They saw him spring from his seat and beat his head up and down, while he shrieked wildly to his comrade.

The distraught fancy of Orestes saw the cattle and their watch-dogs as the pursuing Furies of his mother; and quick as a flash, before his friend could intervene, he had drawn his sword and was slashing right and left amongst the helpless beasts. The herdsmen blew their horns; and soon a crowd had gathered and were pelting the strangers with stones. While the fit of madness lasted Pylades guarded Orestes from attack; but it passed quickly, and the two youths fought together gallantly for life. Not one of the missiles struck home, the goddess, it seemed, taking care to preserve her prey. But at last they were surrounded, and the swords beaten out of their hands.

All, through the tale Iphigenia had listened in pity for the brave youths so cruelly overborne; and now she is suddenly brought back to the thought of the sacrifice and of her part in it. There is a shudder of horror too, when the herdsman reminds her of her prayer in past times for just such a capture as this. She restrains herself with an effort, and coldly bids the man fetch the prisoners; but no sooner has he gone than the tumult of emotion within rushes into speech. Memories of the old times; of the bridal rites that were only a snare; and of the poor timid child that she once had been, imploring her father to be merciful. Thoughts, too, of shipwrecked men and of all the dreadful sacrifices which she cannot and will not

believe that the goddess delights in. And above all, the certainty she feels that Orestes is dead; and which she says has turned her heart to stone and made her pitiless.

So she thinks she will not falter: that though she may have shrunk from the task in former times, this last pain has made her cruel. Yet, when the strangers are brought in, all the hardness melts in a moment.

> "*Ah me!*
> *What mother then was yours, O strangers, say,*
> *And father? And your sister, if you have*
> *A sister: both at once, so young and brave,*
> *To leave her brotherless.*" [1]

Orestes answers, a little irritated at the sight of her tears. Whoever this stranger woman is, it is hardly kind of her, he thinks, to unman them thus by pity; and he bids her cease. They know the form of worship of the country, and are prepared to die.

Iphigenia checks her tears, but she cannot control her desire for news of home and friends. So, rather heartlessly as the prisoners think, she presses eager questions on them—for their name and parentage and city. To Orestes it seems that she is prompted by the shallowest curiosity, and he flings curt phrases at her, refusing the information. But the clamour at her heart will not be silenced by the rebuke: her own pride and the dignity of her office, and every other consideration but this craving for word from Hellas, go down before it. She pleads that she at

least may know what land of Greece they hail from; and grudgingly, in the fewest words possible, Orestes answers that Argos is his land, and his home is at Mycenæ. His words evoke an exclamation of joy from Iphigenia; and as his reluctance gradually breaks up under the spell of her sincerity, he is drawn on to answer her on all those matters which, unknown to either, are of such weighty interest to both.

She asks about Troy, and the fate of Helen: of Calchas, that evil prophet who had bidden her father slay his child: of Achilles, her promised bridegroom, dead long since outside the walls of Troy. And Orestes in his turn begins to wonder who may be this searching questioner, who asks so feelingly of the things that lie closest to his heart. She tells him that she is Greek; and that explains a good deal. But when she comes nearer home, and asks for news of Agamemnon, it is only her evident emotion that wins a reply. Bit by bit she learns that Agamemnon is dead by the hand of Clytemnestra; and a cry escapes her which is full of the sense of the tragedy from the woman's standpoint:

> *"O God!*
> *I pity her that slew . . . and him that slew!"* [1]

Orestes, too, is moved, and begs her, shrinking from further questions which he sees are coming, to desist. One word more, she entreats—what of Clytemnestra? And when the youth, in slow words that seem wrung from him in pain, tells that the great Queen was slain by her

son in vengeance for his father's death, it is again the woman's judgment that springs to utterance:

> "*Alas!*
> *A bad false duty bravely hath he wrought.*" [1]

So little by little the tragic events that have filled the years of her exile are related in this wonderful dialogue, where every sentence that each speaker utters carries a significance to which the other has no clue. All through the scene the underlying dramatic irony is profoundly felt —the ignorance of each of the other's identity; and at moments one holds the breath in suspense. At one time the unknown priestess speaks of the Greek king's daughter who was slain at Aulis; and when the stranger answers that of course nothing more was heard of her, she having died at Aulis, Iphigenia sighs:

> "*Poor child! Poor father, too, who killed and lied!*" [1]

Again, remembering her ominous dream, she asks what has become of Agamemnon's son, and receives the reply:

> "*He lives, now here, now nowhere, bent with ill.*" [1]

So her dream was a lie, she muses, thankfully; and falls silent while the stranger, whose reserve has vanished now, breaks into bitter railing against the gods who have brought him to this pass. Iphigenia scarcely hears him. Relief and gratitude for the fact that Orestes is living: renewed pity for the strangers' doom and some wistful

tenderness for him to whom she has spoken, fill her mind and prompt her to rapid thought.

Suppose she were to rescue them, she ponders, or one of them? And suppose, in doing so, she could bring help to herself from the brother in Argos who believes her dead? Suddenly she turns upon Orestes and begins rapidly to unfold a plan. She knows a way to save him; and she will undertake to give him life in return for a promise. He must pledge himself to carry a letter which she will give him to her friends in Mycenæ.

So her proposal runs to the amazed and grateful youths; but a difficulty instantly arises. Orestes will not by any means consent that Pylades shall be left behind to die. His friend is very dear to him, he says: let Pylades go free and bear the message. The priestess agrees, with a word of admiration for his generous love; and goes into the temple to fetch the tablet, which had been written for her long ago, by a prisoner taken by King Thoas.

While Iphigenia is gone, the friends take a tender farewell of each other. Pylades entreats Orestes to let him stay and die in his stead: he will have no more joy in life, he says, when he returns without his comrade; and men will scorn him for a coward. But the other puts his pleading resolutely on one side, and when the priestess returns with the tablet, both are composed and ready. She has one misgiving, however. She fears that Pylades will forget his trust once he is free of Tauris; and she requires of him an oath that her letter will be delivered. But when the oath is solemnly given, Pylades perceives a

difficulty in his turn. Suppose the tablet should be lost, how could he fulfil his promise? Iphigenia sees that there is only one thing to do—she must repeat the contents of the letter, and the messenger must commit them to memory. So, speaking slowly and impressively, she begins:

> IPHIGENIA. *Say: "To Orestes, Agamemnon's son,*
> *She that was slain in Aulis, dead to Greece,*
> *Yet quick, Iphigenia sendeth peace."*
> ORESTES. *Iphigenia! Where? Back from the dead?*
> IPHIGENIA. *'Tis I. But speak not, lest thou break my thread.*[1]

Orestes and Pylades, after a wild exclamation each to the other, stand listening in bewildered joy as Iphigenia proceeds, relating the story of her rescue by Artemis, and calling upon her brother to come and save her from captivity. During the recital, they have had time to grasp the wonder of the things they have heard; but no ray of the truth has come to Iphigenia. And when Orestes, receiving the letter from the hand of Pylades, turns eagerly to embrace the sister so marvellously saved, she recoils in horror.

Iphigenia, incredulous, thinks he is mocking her. She has been so long dead to love and happiness that she cannot believe that they have come to her at last, and that this is really the brother for whom, a little while before, she had performed the funeral rite. She insists on proof of his

identity; and as he tells over the little homely signs by which she may know him, her doubt slips away and she clasps him in her arms.

They cling to each other, Iphigenia oblivious of everything but her joy, and Orestes loth to recall her to a sense of their danger. Presently her thoughts come painfully back to it, fluttering wildly round each possibility of escape together, and seeing no way clear. But when Orestes tells her of his mission to carry off the statue of the goddess, the very magnitude of its daring clarifies her mind. She sees one way, and though it is not the way that she had hoped, she is ready for the sacrifice. She must secure the statue, and Orestes must escape with it to Attica, as the god commands. For herself, her part will be to stay, and by every means prevent her brother from being followed. She is sure of success in this, and though it mean death for her, it will be sweet to give herself for the peace of one so dear. But Orestes absolutely refuses to accept his life at such a price; and they strain every nerve to contrive a scheme which will carry them to safety together. There is a suggestion to kill Thoas, but the woman who has been sheltered and protected by him will not hear of it. Again, they think of hiding in the temple until nightfall; but that is impracticable, because the guards would see and capture them. And at last Iphigenia, beating backward and forward over all the possible chances, sees a gleam of hope. Slowly and carefully she unfolds her plan. She will give out that the victims for the altar have come from Greece polluted with a mother's blood, and that they may not be

offered to the goddess until they have been cleansed in the sea. The statue, she will say, is unclean too, since one of the captives has touched it; and she will prevail upon the King to allow her to take it, with the victims, down to the seashore. The rest will be Orestes' task; and as his ship with fifty rowers lies waiting for them in the little bay, they should be able to get away before Thoas can follow.

The scheme is at once subtle and daring, but it is their only hope of escape from awful peril; and it is hastily resolved upon. Iphigenia claims a promise of loyalty from her women, sends the prisoners away in charge of attendants, and goes into the temple for the statue. As she comes out again, bearing it in her hands, the King himself arrives. To his astonished questions, she answers as has been arranged, and no point is overlooked by her ingenuity. A herald should be sent before her, to clear the streets, and proclaim that no one must look out, or leave his house, for fear of pollution. Thoas himself, and his attendants, must veil their eyes when her procession passes; and while she is gone, the King is to purge the temple with fire in preparation for her return. Lastly, if she be a long time away, the King need not be anxious, and she must not be disturbed: the cleansing must be thoroughly performed.

The King consents without a shadow of suspicion, impressed by her piety and forethought. The prisoners are led out, and as the procession moves away, Iphigenia utters a prayer for help in her strategy and pardon for the deceit that she has practised on the King. As Thoas returns to

the temple to carry out Iphigenia's injunctions, the Chorus break into an ode in honour of Apollo and Artemis; and for a while there is no sound but the sweet rise and fall of their voices. As time slips by, bringing we know not what fortune to the fugitives, we know that the women of the Chorus, who are in the secret, are tortured by suspense. Then there is a sudden shout; and a messenger comes running from the shore and cries for entrance to the temple. The women try to turn him aside; but he batters upon the gates until Thoas throws them open, angry at the clamour.

In rapid and excited speech the man tells his errand. Let the King come at once, for he has been befooled. The cleansing was a fraud; the statue has been stolen; and the Greek princess and the two young men who were destined for the altar are even now rowing away in a boat which was awaiting them. But if the King will hasten, they may yet be caught; for at this moment they are battling with an adverse wind, and they have no knowledge of the currents of that treacherous shore.

Thoas, furious at the trap into which he has fallen, gives rapid orders: a company of herdsmen is to go to the headlands, and boats are to be put off immediately from the shore. So these crafty Greeks will be overtaken, either by sea or land; and then let them beware of a barbarian's anger! But suddenly, through the shouting and confusion, there is a roll of thunder and a lightning-flash; and descending through the air the goddess Athena is seen. Her voice rings out imperiously, commanding Thoas to

stay his haste. Then, in the awed hush that falls she makes known the will of the gods that Orestes and his sister shall not be pursued. Fate has ordained their escape, and Thoas may not strive against it.

As for Orestes himself, Athena declares that it is laid on him to carry the rescued image of Artemis to Halæ, on the bounds of Attica; and there it will be worshipped with curious rites designed to recall the old barbarity while condemning it. These poor Greek women must be restored to their homes; and, for that fleeing priestess, Destiny has given to her to end her days in peace and gentleness.

[1] From Professor Gilbert Murray's translation of the *Iphigenia in Tauris* (George Allen and Unwin, Ltd.).

Virgil: Dido

NINETEEN years before the birth of Christ the great Roman poet Virgil died, leaving amongst his papers an epic poem which had been the work of many years.

The poem is of course the *Æneid*, and Dido is its heroine. Its hero is one of the Trojan chiefs who fled overseas to Italy, to re-establish his race there at the command of the gods. It actually brings Æneas at one point of his wanderings within three months' time of an incident in the *Odyssey*: it shows us Andromache still mourning for Hector, and the gods still at enmity over the old feud between Greek and Trojan.

From the very beginning of the poem its purpose is clear upon the face of it; and one of the most important results is the creation of a new type of hero. Æneas is not an ardent young soldier like Achilles, nor an acute and hardy sailor like Odysseus, with their zest and *naïveté*. He is a much more complex character, with a deeper estimate of life and some civic virtues which had not been evolved when the earlier heroes were created. He is a pioneer and adventurer who loves above all things home and a settled order; an invader who does not enjoy warfare in the least; a prince who rules by gentleness; a tender son and husband and father who is capable of the deepest cruelty to the woman who loves him; a man sadly

conscious of human weakness, but conscious too of the divine within himself and of the high destiny to which he is called.

The character of Æneas is the primary element in the tragedy of Dido. Because he was such a man, their love for each other was bound to end as it did. Of course there was the external cause, too; also arising out of the design of the poem. For Dido was the founder and Queen of Carthage, the hereditary foe of Rome. And the poet desired to dramatize, as it were, the first clash of the two races in their infancy; to show the origin of the long feud; and to prefigure by a sort of allegory the eventual triumph of Rome. We do not think of the allegory, however, as we read the story of Dido in the First and Fourth Books of the *Æneid*. We are caught in the onward sweep of the poet's imagination, and moved by the intense human interest of the theme. It is only when the catastrophe comes, when Æneas, fleeing from Carthage in the cold dawn, sees the light of the Queen's funeral pyre reddening the sky, that we begin to reflect on the meaning of it. Even then, so complete is the victory of the poet's art, our last thought is one of pity—for the indignant spirit of Dido that has fled to the House of Shadows; and for the miserable man no less, whom fate is driving to the coast of Italy.

When Troy was sacked, Æneas sailed away with twenty ships, and all that remained dear to him of home. His wife Creusa was killed as they were escaping from the

burning city; but his household gods were preserved, and these he carried with him in his flight, with his aged father and his little son Iulus.

Misfortune followed him, however. Juno, still unrelenting in her anger against the race of Paris, buffeted him to and fro upon the seas for seven years, and cast him at length upon the shore of Libya. The greater part of his fleet was scattered, and perhaps lost for ever; his own crew was broken by the long struggle; and he himself, under the cheery manner which he assumed to encourage his men, was heart-sick with despair. What this strange land was he did not know. It seemed wild and desolate: it was most probably inhabited by barbarians, and at any moment a savage horde might fall upon them.

But the country was not hostile, as Æneas's goddess-mother Venus took care to assure him, meeting him in the guise of a mountain nymph. It was the new land of Dido, the Tyrian princess who had fled from her native country and the evil rule of her brother Pygmalion. The late King of Tyre, her father, had given her in marriage to one she dearly loved, Sichæus, a priest of Heracles, and the wealthiest man of all the wealthy East. But a little later the King had died. Pygmalion succeeded to the throne, and in greed for Sichæus's wealth he secretly slew him at his own altar.

For some time he hid his guilt and tried to win from Dido, in her grief, the immense treasures of Sichæus. But her intelligence, and her love for her murdered husband, could not be long deceived. She discovered her

brother's guilt, and realizing that to remain in Tyre would mean her death too, she instantly laid plans to leave the country. It was to be no timid surrender, however. She gathered about her all those who hated Pygmalion's tyranny, and proposed that they should join her. Ships were seized and rapidly manned, Sichæus's wealth was stored in them, and Dido sailed to found a new city on the coast of Africa.

At the moment when Æneas landed there, the building of the city was in eager progress; and Dido, the brain of the enterprise, was beginning to forget her sorrow in the joy of achievement. When Æneas climbed the hill above the bay, he saw the city stretched beneath, and the Tyrians busy upon it "like bees in summer fields." Walls were rising, trenches were being dug and foundations laid: houses and streets were already finished: great blocks were being hewn for the citadel and columns for the theatre; while in the centre of the town, complete in every detail of ornament, a magnificent temple stood. Here Æneas made his way, passing invisibly through the crowded street by the spells of Venus. As he stood gazing at the walls, marvelling to see that they were carved with the history of his Troy, a shout arose. The great Queen was coming.

Dido took her seat upon a throne raised high beneath the central dome, surrounded by her guards. Before her thronged the captains of her great work, merchants, emissaries from distant states, and many of her own folk who had come to petition her for justice. She was the ruling

spirit, and by no mere accident. Æneas stood in amazement at the scene, as she allotted to each his task, and adjudged every difficult question, and dispensed the law.

Suddenly there was a tumult outside the gate, and a noisy interruption, as a band of foreigners approached the temple and claimed audience of the Queen. The strangers were brought in, and Æneas, in joyful astonishment, recognized in them the comrades who he had thought were lost. He longed to rush forward to greet them, but Venus's spell was on him still; and he stood invisible while the Trojans threw themselves on the mercy of the Queen and implored her help. She answered kindly, and with modest dignity. Long ago she had heard and pitied the fate of Troy, she said; and though she is bound to guard her infant state against invasion, she has no quarrel with a peaceful folk, and least of all with fugitives from Troy. She will, if they so desire, send them away in safety, with provision from her ample store.

> "*But should you wish to settle here with me,*
> *This city I am building, it is yours.*
> *Draw up your ships. Without distinction both*
> *Trojan and Tyrian I alike will treat.*
> *Oh, would that driven by the same South Wind,*
> *Your king Æneas self were here!*" [1]

Æneas could keep silence no longer. Breaking the spell of darkness that was shrouding him, he gained the throne and stood before the astonished Queen.

"I, whom thou seekest, here before thee stand—
Trojan Æneas." [1]

It is a great moment, fraught with significance of which the two chief actors seem to have a perception. To Dido, this handsome prince whose fame has reached her, and whose melancholy history is so like her own, seems to have flashed upon her as the fulfilment of her wish. And to Æneas, who has just learned that she can be kind as well as brave, she seems peerless among women. While from each to each is passed the silent intuitive sense that here is a nature great and good. Æneas, touched by her generosity to his comrades, tries to thank her. But he feels that only the gods can reward her adequately.

In the warmth of his words there is a hint of coming passion; and thinking of the tragic end, there is something ominous in them too. Æneas will indeed remember Dido in far-off lands, but otherwise than he imagines. And she, as she invites the Trojans to banquet in her palace and hospitably begs them to make their home in Carthage, is serenely unconscious of the pitiful entreaties that she will one day make to Æneas.

The ships were laid up, and generous provision made for the weary sailors, while their chief and his friends were feasted by the Queen in Oriental splendour and luxury. Rich gifts from Troy were presented to Dido by Æneas, and received by her with great delight. There were the jewels of Ilione, King Priam's eldest daughter: the sceptre that she had borne, her diadem of gold and

gems, and the pearls that once hung about her neck. They were scarcely of happy omen, one would think; but more ill-fated still were the presents that Dido found most beautiful.

> *A mantle stiff with figures, and with gold,*
> *A veil, too, with a border wrought about*
> *Of saffron-flowered acanthus, ornaments*
> *Of Argive Helen.*[1]

Yet no shadow from their history fell upon the Queen. She was strangely happy as she listened to her guest and caressed his beautiful little son. She did not know that the mighty love-goddess was plotting against her; and when the feast was over, she rose to pour a libation to the gods with a prayer for peace and blessing.

When the Fourth Book opens Æneas is still the honoured guest of the Queen, entertained by her at the banquet as each succeeding night falls, and accompanying her during the day as she rides to inspect the progress of her city. But Dido was no longer quite untroubled in her happiness. She could not hide from herself her growing love for the Trojan hero; and she was assailed by a sense of wrong to her dead husband.

At first she fought against her passion and called up every resource of pride and modesty to hide it from the Prince. But the emotion of a richly dowered nature was not easily to be kept in check; and Dido had not learned to dissemble. The inner conflict grew daily stronger, absorbing every thought: on the one hand drawing her

irresistibly toward Æneas, and on the other claiming fidelity to the memory of Sichæus. At last, craving relief and counsel, she confided in her sister Anna. But Anna was no idealist, and her advice to Dido was the plainest common sense. Was she to waste all her life for the sake of faith to the dead? It was certain that Sichæus himself would not desire it; and why then should Dido renounce the joys of love and motherhood? Why pine alone all her days, her country menaced on every side by wild African tribes, because she had no warrior at her side to make them fear? So the argument ran, turning adroitly from questions of sentiment to the call of patriotism and ambition. Undoubtedly Dido was right in refusing marriage with the barbarian chiefs who had asked for her hand; but she must remember that she had thereby made enemies of them. Let her consider the danger to her little state from these jealous kings; and on the other hand let her think of the power and glory which Carthage might win, if only it were allied to the race of Troy. Lastly, added the astute pleader, with a word which she knew had power to move her sister, for her part she believed that the coming of Æneas was ordained by heaven, and by Juno herself, the great goddess of marriage.

No wonder that Dido's resolution was weakened, when every instinct of her being was thus championed, and the only opponent was an idea, an abstraction, that even to herself began to look fantastic. Again she begged her guest to remain in Carthage, and the memory of Sichæus began rapidly to fade.

Then at night, when the guests are gone from the banquet: when—

> *The wan moon pales her light, and waning stars*
> *Persuade to sleep, she in her empty halls*
> *Mourns all alone, and throws herself along*
> *The couch where he had lain.*[1]

Æneas himself was losing all thought of his mission in the society of the lovely Queen. Italy was forgotten in the peace and luxury of his life; and he gave himself up to content, without one glance beyond the present. He had toiled so long and hard; surely he might take his ease for a while. Moreover, it would be mere churlishness to refuse Dido's gracious bounty; and he could not be so ungentle. So both the lovers wrapped themselves in a golden dream, with reality shut far away.

All the happy toil of brain and muscle was suspended, and Carthage, silent in the sun all day, gave itself up, like its Queen, to idleness and revelry. The weeks slipped quickly by, and one by one the restraints which her clear spirit had imposed were loosened or forgotten. And then the autumn came, and the fatal day of the hunt, when Dido gave herself without reserve or shame to her lover.

> *The nymphs*
> *Along the mountain-tops were heard to wail.*
> *That day bred death, disasters manifold;*
> *For now she took no heed what men might say.*[1]

She who had been so proud and chaste, whose wisdom

and fidelity had been the fame of all the countries round about, was now the prey of every evil tongue. Rumour flew from city to city, soiling her fair name; and soon it was known in all the jealous neighbouring lands that the Queen of Carthage had joined herself in unlawful union with Æneas, Prince of Troy. The reputation that had been so painfully won was quickly lost; and not one of her many qualities were remembered. The courage and quick wit and resource, the generous hospitality, the impartial judgment, the kindness and tender sympathy—were all forgotten.

Dido knew of the malignance and scorn that were smouldering about her; but she was too honest to hide her sin, and secure in Æneas's love, she paid no heed. Together they recommenced the work which had lain idle so long; and as winter came, the towers began to rise again.

But now the gods grew envious of the little barbarian state, and Jupiter turned an angry glance upon Æneas. Was this the end for which he had been saved from Troy —to make his home among a savage people, heedless of the divine command? Has he so poor a soul that he is content to spend his days in dalliance while the fair land of Italy cries out for a hand to govern it? Let Mercury carry to the Prince this warning from the ruler of Olympus:

> "*With what hopes lingers he*
> *'Mongst hostile races, heedless of the great*
> *Ausonian line, and the Lavinian plains?*
> *Let him put out to sea! My last word this.*"[1]

The message fell upon Æneas with a shock of fear and remorse. His dream was shattered: his sleeping conscience suddenly sprang to life, and in a flash he saw the long months spent in Carthage as treachery to the gods, to his countrymen, and to the son who was to inherit the great Roman state. In a rush of penitence, his first thought was to flee instantly: to leave at once and for ever the land that had seen his folly. But the moment after he remembered Dido, and realized in horror all the suffering that he would bring to her. He knew the intensity of her love; and recalling all her kindness to him and his, he could not summon courage to face her and tell her that he must go. Weakly he resolved to prepare in secret for departure; and orders were sent down to the ships to fit out with all speed. But the unworthy act was bound to bring disaster. Word was soon brought to the Queen that the Trojan fleet was being furtively prepared for sea, and she leapt to the obvious conclusion. Æneas intended to forsake her—and to go by stealth. All her frank nature revolted at the deception. That he should wish to go at all, lightly flinging away her love and honour, was a thing that her own fidelity had never suspected; but to steal away thus was baseness that drove her to fury. Her ungoverned Oriental rage was loosed upon him.

> "*False as thou art, and didst thou hope, ay, hope*
> *To keep thy infamous intent disguised,*
> *And steal away in silence from my realm?*" [1]

But the first gust of anger past, she dropped to a softer

mood and besought him by every tender plea that her tongue could frame, not to leave her—by their great love, by her trust in him, and the pledge that he had given her; by the constant service that she had paid him, and all that she had forfeited for his sake.

It would seem that her anguish must melt a heart of stone, but Æneas remained apparently unmovable. Before him still shone the vision of the god, and in his ears Jove's message rang insistently. Controlling every tender impulse, he answered in words that were made harsh by restraint. To Dido their coldness was as cruel as death and far more bitter. She did not know the gentle Æneas in the grip of the force that was driving him, transforming him into a monster of ingratitude.

> *"This man thrown up a beggar on my shores,*
> *I took him in, insanely gave him up*
> *A portion of my realm, from very death*
> *Redeemed his comrades, saved his scattered ships.*
> *. . . Go! Make for Italy!*
> *Chased by the winds, across the wild waves seek,*
> *These vaunted kingdoms! But in sooth I hope*
> *If the benignant Gods can aught avail,*
> *Vengeance will strike thee midway on the rocks,*
> *Calling and calling upon Dido's name."* [1]

She was borne away fainting, and Æneas, racked by pity that he dare not show, made his way down to the harbour to hasten the sailing of the fleet. Day by day his men toiled with a will, for they were sick of inaction and eager

to get away, although winter was already upon them. And watching from her tower, Dido saw each day's work completed with deeper misery, and a growing sense of despair. Very soon now all would be ready; the day was rapidly approaching when Æneas would trust himself to that stormy winter sea, with small chance, as she knew, of ever reaching Latium. At the thought of that final parting and of her lover's danger, Dido's anger melted, and every vestige of her pride was swept away. She could not and would not let him go like this. At the risk of worse humiliation still, she would make another effort to keep him in Carthage, at least until the stormy season should be passed. In feverish haste she called Anna and sent a poignant message.

> "*In pity of my love,*
> *Let him concede this boon—the last I crave,—*
> *And wait propitious winds to speed his flight.*" [1]

But Æneas is inexorable, and when Anna returns to the Queen with his refusal, it adds the last intolerable touch to her pain and shame. Nightlong she roams the palace, like one distraught; and finding her way to the tomb of Sichæus, she prays to die. Strange omens answer her; and to her maddened brain it seems that the voice of her husband is calling her to come to him. The water of her libation turns black as she pours it upon the altar, and the wine congeals to blood. The high gods have answered her: they approve her purpose.

As soon as day comes, she begins with deliberate care to make all ready for her death. Under her directions,

a great pyre is built within the courtyard, on which the Queen announces that she intends to offer a solemn sacrifice. Every relic of Æneas is gathered and laid upon it; his armour, his cloak, and his sword; while all about it Dido herself hangs garlands and funeral chaplets. Her sister and her women wonder, but have no hint of her intention. When night falls and all the palace is sunk in sleep, Dido stands again before the altar and consecrates herself for the sacrifice. But she cannot yet take the fatal step. She longs for one more look from her watch-tower, down upon the ships that are so soon to carry her lover away. So she strains her eyes through the darkness, only to find, with the first gleam of light, that the harbour is bare. The fleet has sailed: Æneas, warned by a vision from Jove, has fled in the night. A bitter cry escapes her. She calls upon the great powers of Earth and Sky and the dreadful Underworld to avenge her wrongs; and looking forward to the years that are to come, she invokes upon Æneas and his descendants the curse that followed the Roman race through many generations:

> *"So then do you,*
> *My Tyrians, harry with envenomed hate*
> *His race and kin through ages yet to come:*
> *Be this your tribute to my timeless death! . . .*
> *Let coast conflict with coast, and sea with sea,*
> *Embattled host with host, and endless war*
> *Be waged, 'twixt their and your posterity!"* [1]

Then, rushing to the courtyard, she climbs the great pyre, and grasps Æneas's sword. For one moment, ere

she falls upon it, the frenzy lifts from her brain and shows her all the course of her troubled life.

> *"Lo! I have lived my life, have run the course*
> *Assigned to me by fate; now 'neath the earth*
> *I go, the queenly shade of what I was.*
> *I have built a goodly city; I have seen*
> *Its walls complete; I have avenged my spouse,*
> *And struck my cruel brother blow for blow! . . .*
>
> *"This heartless Trojan, let him from the waves*
> *Drink in with startled eyes the funeral fires,*
> *And bear with him the presage of my death!"* [1]

So the founder of Carthage died; and the father of great Rome, looking back with remorseful eyes from his fleeing ship, saw the flames of her pyre reddening the dawn.

[1] From Sir Theodore Martin's translation of the *Æneid* (William Blackwood and Sons).

Index

ABSYRTUS, 193, 194
Achilles, 21, 22, 25, 29, 30, 35, 37, 116, 117, 220, 229, 237
Admetus, 177, 178, 179, 180, 181, 182, 183, 184, 185, 186, 187, 189, 190
Adrastus, 161
Æëtes, 193, 194
Ægeus, 202
Æneas, 33, 237, 238, 239, 240, 241, 242, 243, 244, 245, 246, 247, 248, 249, 250
Æolus, 54
Æschylus, 83, 84, 85, 86, 98, 109, 110, 111, 113, 114, 123, 124, 134, 135, 157, 161, 220
Agamemnon, 19, 32, 34, 49, 85, 86, 87, 88, 89, 90, 91, 92, 93, 94, 95, 97, 98, 99, 100, 101, 107, 109, 113, 117, 119, 121, 219, 220, 221, 222, 225, 229, 230, 232
Alcestis, 177, 180, 181, 182, 184, 185, 187, 189, 190, 191
Alcinous, 52, 53, 70, 74, 75, 77, 78, 79, 194
Andromache, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31, 32, 33, 117, 237
Anna, 244, 249
Antigone, 136, 141, 155, 156, 157, 158, 159, 160, 161, 162, 163, 164, 165, 168, 169, 170, 171, 172, 173, 174, 175, 176
Antinous, 38, 40, 41, 42, 44
Aphrodite, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 208, 209, 210, 211, 213, 218
Apollo, 63, 79, 87, 90, 93, 94, 99, 103, 106, 107, 108, 109, 111, 112, 114, 118, 121, 137, 138, 141, 142, 150, 160, 178, 180, 181, 182, 191, 202, 219, 221, 235
Ares, 20, 26, 35
Arete, 70, 78
Argus, 128
Artemis, 178, 209, 210, 212, 218, 220, 221, 222, 224, 225, 232, 235, 236
Astyanax, 32, 33
Athena, 17, 18, 26, 29, 39, 40, 43, 47, 64, 70, 72, 73, 76, 78, 79, 219, 235, 236
Athene (*see* Athena)
Atlas, 62, 124

CADMUS, 134
Calchas, 229
Calypso, 38, 51, 62, 63, 64, 65, 66, 67, 68, 72
Cassandra, 32, 90, 93, 112, 113, 114, 115, 116, 117, 118, 119, 120, 121, 135
Charon, 183
Charybdis, 61
Chiron, 192
Chrysothomis, 136
Circe, 36, 51, 53, 54, 55, 56, 57, 58, 59, 60, 61, 62, 63, 194
Clytemnestra, 84, 85, 86, 87, 88, 89, 90, 91, 92, 93, 94, 95, 96, 97, 98, 99, 100, 101, 103, 107, 108, 114, 119, 120, 135, 219, 220, 221, 229,

Creon, 141, 142, 143, 144, 146, 147, 148, 155, 156, 158, 159, 161, 163, 164, 165, 166, 167, 168, 169, 170, 171, 172, 173, 174, 175, 176, 195, 196, 198, 199, 205
Creusa, 238
Cronos, 124
Cyclops, the, 54, 72
Cypris, 208, 213, 214

Dido, 237, 238, 239, 240, 242, 243, 244, 245, 246, 247, 248, 249, 250
Diomedes, 26, 184
Dionysus, 83

Eëtion, 25
Egisthus, 88, 89, 95, 97, 101, 104, 107, 108
Electra, 96, 98, 99, 100, 101, 102, 103, 104, 105, 106, 107, 109, 110, 111, 135, 136
Elpenor, 60
Enone, 17, 20
Epaphus, 132
Epicasta, 137
Eteocles, 141, 159, 161, 162, 163, 166
Euripides, 31, 84, 109, 110, 111, 113, 114, 178, 180, 195, 207, 211, 219, 220
Euryclea, 43, 46, 48
Eurydice, 176
Eurylochus, 55, 58
Eurystheus, 184

Force, 126

Glaucé, 195, 201, 202, 203, 204

Hæmon, 171, 172, 173, 175
Hector, 19, 21, 22, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31, 33, 116, 237
Hecuba, 27, 32, 117, 118
Hekabe (*see* Hecuba)
Helen, 15, 16, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 25, 26, 32, 36, 37, 38, 39, 86, 112, 115, 222, 229, 243
Helenus, 33
Hephæstus, 126
Hera, 17, 18, 29, 124, 128, 129, 139
Heracles, 124, 132, 184, 185, 188, 190, 191, 239
Hermes, 56, 57, 65, 66, 99, 188
Hesiod, 125
Hippolytus, 207, 208, 209, 210, 211, 213, 214, 215, 216, 217, 218
Homer, 25, 49, 56, 71, 81, 112, 134, 137
Hymen, 118

Icarius, 41, 49, 52
Idomeneus, 116
Ilione, 242
Inachus, 124, 129
Io, 123, 124, 128, 129, 131, 132, 135
Iphigenia, 85, 86, 101, 220, 221, 222, 223, 225, 226, 227, 228, 229, 230, 231, 232, 233, 234
Iris, 20
Irus, 44
Ismene, 136, 141, 155, 157, 162, 164, 165, 170, 171
Iulus, 239

Jason, 192, 193, 194, 195, 196, 197, 198, 199, 200, 201, 202, 203, 205, 206
Jocasta, 134, 137, 138, 139, 140, 141, 147, 148, 149, 150, 151, 152, 153, 155, 156

Index

Jove, 248, 250
Juno, 239, 244
Jupiter, 246

LAERTES, 49
Laius, 137, 138, 139, 140, 141, 143, 145, 148, 149, 152
Leto, 224

MEDEA, 192, 193, 194, 195, 196, 198, 199, 200, 201, 202, 203, 205, 206, 211
Medon, 42, 43
Menelaus, 16, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 32
Mercury, 246
Merope, 138, 139, 149, 151
Minos, 45

NAUSICAA, 51, 71, 73, 74, 75, 76, 78, 79, 80
Neoptolemus, 117

OCEANUS, 127
Odysseus, 23, 34, 35, 37, 38, 39, 40, 42, 43, 44, 45, 46, 47, 48, 49, 51, 52, 53, 54, 56, 57, 58, 59, 60, 61, 62, 63, 64, 65, 66, 67, 68, 70, 71, 72, 73, 75, 76, 77, 78, 79, 80, 117, 237
Œdipus, 137, 138, 139, 140, 141, 142, 143, 144, 145, 146, 147, 148, 149, 150, 151, 152, 153, 155, 156, 158, 159, 160, 161, 162, 164, 170
Orestes, 85, 97, 99, 101, 102, 103, 104, 105, 106, 107, 108, 109, 110, 111, 219, 220, 221, 223, 224, 225, 227, 228, 229, 230, 231, 232, 233, 234, 236
Othryoneus, 116

PARIS, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 25, 26, 114, 115, 239
Patroclus, 29, 30
Pelias, 178, 192, 194
Pelops, 225
Penelope, 34, 36, 37, 38, 39, 40, 41, 42, 43, 44, 45, 46, 47, 48, 49, 51, 52, 53, 63, 66, 67, 71, 134, 135
Persephone, 59
Phædra, 207, 208, 209, 210, 211, 212, 213, 214, 215, 216, 217
Pheres, 187
Philoctetes, 22
Phoebus, 143
Polybus, 138, 139, 149, 150, 151, 152
Polynices, 141, 159, 161, 162, 163, 164, 165, 166, 167, 175
Polyxena, 117
Poseidon, 23, 34, 35, 71, 72, 73, 77, 160, 161, 217
Priam, 16, 21, 22, 25, 28, 30, 31, 32, 90, 112, 114, 115, 116, 242
Prometheus, 124, 125, 126, 127, 128, 129, 130, 131, 132, 160
Pygmalion, 239, 240
Pylades, 99, 107, 221, 224, 226, 227, 231, 232

RHODIUS, Apollonius, 192

SCYLLA, 61
Sichæus, 239, 240, 244, 249
Sophocles, 84, 109, 110, 134, 135, 136, 142, 156, 164, 174

TALTHYBIUS, 117, 119
Tantalus, 85, 103
Telemachus, 23, 38, 39, 40, 41, 42, 43, 44, 46, 47
Themis, 132
Theseus, 160, 161, 207, 209, 213, 215, 217

Thetis, 29, 37
Thoas, 222, 225, 231, 233, 234, 235, 236
Tiresias, 59, 60, 140, 141, 144, 145, 146, 148, 175
Tyndareus, 18, 19, 36
Typhon, 124

Venus, 239, 240, 241
Virgil, 237

Zeus, 17, 28, 29, 36, 43, 46, 56, 62, 64, 65, 66, 77, 79, 93, 105, 106, 123, 124, 125, 126, 127, 128, 129, 130, 131, 191